

World War II in Andreï Makine's Historiographic Metafiction

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ÉTUDES DE LANGUE ET LITTÉRATURE FRANÇAISES

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World War II in Andreï Makine's Historiographic Metafiction

'No One Is Forgotten, Nothing Is Forgotten'

By

Helena Duffy



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Cover illustration: Soviet soldier trying to snatch a bicycle from a lady. Photography by an unknown photographer (May 1945–1946, Berlin?). © bpk Bildagentur.

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Preface

This project germinated late in 2011 when my laptop was still resting on my belly swollen with new life. Yet, instead of thinking of the future, as I perhaps should have been, my thoughts were on the past and, even more surprisingly, on the dark subject of the last world war. Or maybe my concerns did stem from my preoccupation with my son's prospects after all, and in particular with his safety, since my own Polish childhood had been overshadowed by the spectre of World War II and, with the Cold War in full swing, by the threat of another and potentially yet more lethal global conflict. As far back as my memories go, television screens were filled with black-and-white Polish and Soviet war films and television series: *Seventeen Moments of Spring*, *More than Life at Stake*, or *Four Tank-Men and a Dog*. Those were interspersed with colour Western movies projecting a nuclear apocalypse that one day would inevitably resolve the tension between the USA and the USSR. That this was not an unlikely possibility could be inferred from the omnipresence of the last war's legacy; the buildings in my city still bore scars left by machine gun fire. A T-34 and 'Vanya', as the statue of the Red Army soldier put up in honour of Poland's 'liberators' was familiarly called, were my city's two most prominent monuments. Veterans hobbled on crutches and in the summer Holocaust survivors displayed their blood-curdling, bluish tattoos. Yet, most mysteriously of all, a lady I often saw at my bus stop would puzzle those unaware of her wartime ordeal at the hands of the Gestapo with a waterproof cape that she wore in rain or sunshine. Bookshop windows were full of works, both fictional and academic, about the war, and one Christmas as a Secret Santa present I received a pair of nylon stockings and a book about the World War II fortunes of some Soviet battleship. Needless to say, being only thirteen I found either of little interest or use.

Despite a considerable age difference between us, this is what Andreï Makine and myself share: a childhood over which loomed large a catastrophe that had affected the lives of our grandparents and parents, that had literally shaped the world we grew up in and that was tirelessly commemorated in both the Soviet Union and its satellite states. In the process war memory was refashioned, romanticised, simplified, politicised and, effectively, distorted. Consequently, in my imagination it was the Polish partisans who, with a little help from their Soviet friends, a dashing secret agent, Hans Kloss (the alias of Stanisław Kolicki), and a friendly Alsatian called Sharik won the Second World War. Six million Poles lost their lives between September 1939 and May 1945. We had been brave, organising the resistance and maintaining our dignity; one

could be shot dead for the most minor offences, captured in the street at random and be sent to Germany as a forced labourer or to a concentration camp as a human guinea pig. We saved Jews, despite the draconian measures against those who were discovered to do so. But, curiously, 'Holocaust' was an unknown word and Auschwitz a place where *Polish* citizens (including those of Jewish origin) had been massacred. From my first visit to the former camp I remember long rows of photographs captioned with the names of those murdered: -ski, -ska, -icz were the endings, not -baum, -blum or -stein. Having said that, there existed an alternative discourse, a clandestine one. In whispers people around me said: Ribbentrop-Molotov, Lwów, Monte Casino, Katyń, Fieldorf-*Nil*. Others must have been saying: Jedwabne, Radziłów, Wąsosz, Szczuczyn.

Luckily, since then much has changed in Polish historiography and so has it in Russia, although there, as Makine's writing alone confirms, the cult of the brave, self-sacrificing, kind-hearted and patriotic Ivan who singlehandedly defeated fascism has proven more resistant to historical revisionism than its Polish equivalent. Even more worryingly, the myth of Soviet martyrdom and heroism has recently found a new strength thanks to Putin's Soviet-style government. And yet, during *perestroika*, cracks started to appear in the simultaneously tragic and heroic image of the war which, forged as of the first days of the Russo-German conflict, had been very much *de rigueur* throughout the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras. And so some hard facts about Russia's twentieth-century past began to be written back into Russian history. Among these were the USSR's 1939 invasion of Finland, the 1938 Russo-German pact, the 1939 Nazi Germany's and USSR's joint invasion of Poland, the annexation of the Baltic states, the 1940 Katyń massacre of twenty thousand Polish officers, the expatriations of whole ethnic groups suspected of German collaboration, or the mass rapes and lootings committed by the Red Army on its way to Berlin. Similarly, the Soviet soldiers' desertions, the NKVD units shooting those retreating or wounded, Stalin's wartime crimes towards his own people, the *gulag*, the notorious punishment battalions, the tragic fate of Soviet prisoners of war returning from German captivity, the collaboration with the enemy in the German-occupied parts of the USSR, or, finally, the Soviet wartime anti-Semitism stopped being a secret to anyone. Anyone, so it seems, except Andrei Makine.

This is why this book *had* to be written: to take issue with novels that, evidently destined for Western consumption, propagate an overwhelmingly positive image of the Soviets' role in the worldwide conflict. Having lived on both sides of the Iron Curtain, I feel compelled to tackle Makine's depiction of the war, which seems to me deliberately misleading. One way of achieving this, I feel, is by comparing and contrasting the author's vision with two different

narratives on the historical period in question: the official Soviet one and the one created in the West and in post-*perestroika* Russia, which, although also inevitably tendentious, must be less so than Soviet-time propaganda. Indeed, all discourse on the past, as Makine's narrators themselves repeatedly tell us, thus echoing postmodern historians and novelists, is subjective, partial, *mythical*, intertextual, divorced from empirical experience, determined by the concerns of here and now, and motivated by political interests. Is Makine therefore a historiographic metafictionist, as Linda Hutcheon brands those postmodern writers who probe the secrets of the past in order to, paradoxically, flaunt the impossibility of knowing or narrating history? And if so, is it possible to embrace the postmodern rhetoric of doubt and relativity, and the poetics of fragment connected to the *histories* of those marginalised and oppressed, in order to ultimately reaffirm the totalising and monolithic narrative of tyrannical power? These are the central questions posed by the present book that sets out to explore the potential clash between the postmodern aura of Makine's novels and their curiously conservative political agenda. This book is intent on exploring these novels' implications not only for the understanding of World War II among Makine's Western readers, but also for a theory that attaches postmodernism to historical revisionism and political dissent. Before giving full attention to these issues without, however, being able to provide unequivocal answers to the questions arising from my analyses, I can assert one thing: while being a potentially politically dangerous phenomenon, by speaking in the name of those silenced by a repressive regime and yet promoting reactionary values, the Franco-Russian author's beautifully written, engaging and moving prose is, as is all historiographic metafiction, an artistically self-contradictory enterprise.

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Author's Note

Some material included in this book has previously appeared in the form of articles, essays and book chapters.

Parts of Chapter 3 have been published as 'The Veteran's Wounded Body Before the Mirror: the Dialectic of Wholeness and Disintegration in Andreï Makine's Prose', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 1.2 (2008), 175–88; and as 'Long Live the *Kommunalka*! The Tension between Postmodern Poetics and Post-Soviet Nostalgia in the Work of Andreï Makine', *Twentieth Century Communism: A Journal of International History*, 11 (Autumn 2016), 97–113.

Parts of Chapter 4 have been included in the book chapter 'The Jew as St Christopher: The Holocaust and the Participation of Soviet Jews in Russia's Great Patriotic War Effort in the *Oeuvre* of Andreï Makine', in *Mnemosyne and Mars: Artistic and Cultural Representations of Twentieth-Century Europe at War*, ed. by Peter Tame, Dominique Jeanerrod and Manuel Bragança (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 343–60.

Parts of Chapter 5 have appeared in 'On connaît la musique: La vie culturelle au temps du siège de Leningrad dans *La Vie d'un homme inconnu* d'Andreï Makine', *Lublin Studies in Modern Languages and Literature*, 39.1 (2015), 142–62.

Finally, some of the ideas included in Chapter 1 have already been explored in 'Une histoire vraie: *La Terre et le ciel* de Jacques Dorme d'Andreï Makine comme exemple de métafiction historiographique', *Romanica Wratislaviensia*, 61 (2014), 121–38, and 'A False Document: Andreï Makine's *Le Testament français* and the Postmodern Theory of History', *Irish Journal of French Studies*, 14.1 (2014), 137–59.

Abbreviations of the Titles of Andreï Makine's Novels

<i>TFA</i>	<i>Au temps du fleuve Amour</i>
<i>CPPD</i>	<i>Confession d'un porte-drapeau déchu</i>
<i>FA</i>	<i>La Femme qui attendait</i>
<i>FHUS</i>	<i>La Fille d'un Héros de l'Union soviétique</i>
<i>MV</i>	<i>La Musique d'une vie</i>
<i>TCJD</i>	<i>La Terre et le ciel de Jacques Dorme</i>
<i>COA</i>	<i>Le Crime d'Olga Arbélina</i>
<i>PLS</i>	<i>Le Pays du Lieutenant Schreiber</i>
<i>TF</i>	<i>Le Testament français</i>
<i>RE</i>	<i>Requiem pour l'Est</i>
<i>UFA</i>	<i>Une femme aimée</i>

Introduction: Andreï Makine, the Great Fatherland War, the Historical Novel and (Russian) Postmodernism

History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as our perceptiveness and knowledge.

SALMAN RUSHDIE

• • •

Peut-être avons-nous une résistance invincible à croire au passé, à l'Histoire, sinon sous forme du mythe.

[Perhaps we have an invincible resistance to believing in the past, in History, except in the form of myth.]

ROLAND BARTHES

• •

The title of the present book includes the well-known line from Olga Berggolts's poem — 'No one is forgotten, nothing is forgotten' — that is carved out on the Memorial Wall at Saint Petersburg's Piskarevskoye Cemetery, an enormous necropolis housing the remains of the two hundred and fifty thousand anonymous women and men who perished during the siege of Leningrad.¹ Yet, like the rest of the poem, which links the plight of those caught up between 1941 and 1944 in the German encirclement of the city to the nationwide struggle, and which rationalises their heroism as the legacy of the October Revolution, the phrase promising that the dead will be duly remembered cannot be taken at face value. As Lisa Kirschenbaum explains, Piskarevskoye Cemetery is a space where remembrance has been accompanied by, and has often given way

¹ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941–1995: Myth, Memories and Monuments* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 191. I am using here Daniel Weissbort's translation of Berggolts's poem. *Modern Poetry in Translation: New Series*, ed. by Daniel Weissbort (Winter 1996).

to, mythmaking and forgetting,² in order to be exploited for political ends by subsequent Soviet and post-Soviet regimes.³ Created under the pretext of finally paying tribute to those whose memory could not be fully honoured under Stalin, the cemetery was part of the emerging cult of the war, which, as Nina Tumarkin demonstrates, was more about effacing and distorting than preserving the memory of its victims.⁴ The war cult, notes Kirschenbaum, 'effaced, ignored and distorted so much of the Soviet war experience',⁵ as illustrated by the war memorials constructed under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, including that at the Piskarevskoye Cemetery, which, in Michael Ignatieff's terms, 'manag[e] both to consecrate and obliterated the deaths that occurred there.'⁶

It is precisely because of its ironic resonance that I have placed Berggolts's phrase in the title of my book dealing with the prose of Andreï Makine, a Siberian-born French-language writer who, as Thierry Laurent rightly observes, has shown a greater interest in World War II than any other contemporary Russian author, whether writing in his native language or not.⁷ Moreover, Makine's novels — one of which, coincidentally, uses Berggolts's famous words to expose the divergence between the state-manufactured war cult and a soldier's personal frontline memories — seem to be intent on revealing the fallacy of the totalising and impersonal Soviet-time war narrative. To put it differently, Makine's oeuvre appears to aim to free war memory from the shackles of Soviet propaganda, which, placing emphasis on survival, heroism and glory, re-presented the 1941–1945 clash between Stalin and Hitler as an unrivalled epic, and the Soviets themselves as the greatest victors the world had ever seen.⁸ The Franco-Russian author achieves this, as we will see in this book, by refocusing attention on individual experience, and in particular on personal loss, suffering and trauma, which for decades were systematically ignored or

2 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 202. See also Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, 'Nothing Is Forgotten: Individual Memory and the Myth of the Great Patriotic War', in *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe*, ed. by Frank Biess and Robert G. Moeller (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), pp. 67–82.

3 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, pp. 200–8.

4 Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), pp. 125–56.

5 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 205.

6 Michael Ignatieff, 'Soviet War Memorials', *History Workshop*, 17 (Spring 1984), 157–63 (p. 157).

7 Thierry Laurent, 'La Seconde Guerre mondiale dans l'oeuvre d'Andreï Makine', in *Le Monde selon Andreï Makine*, ed. by Murielle Lucie Clément and Marco Caratozzolo (Berlin: Éditions Universitaires Européennes, 2011), pp. 301–9, p. 301.

8 Gregory Carleton, 'Victory in Death: Annihilation Narratives in Russia Today', *History and Memory*, 21.3 (2010), 135–68 (p. 139).

at least inadequately acknowledged by Soviet authorities and historiography. More specifically, the stories narrated by Makine's novels belong to fallen heroes, war invalids, survivors of the siege of Leningrad, frontline nurses, war widows, Jewish fighters, Holocaust victims, members of punishment battalions, foreigners fighting with the Red Army, or, finally, victims of the political terror that continued to hold the Soviet populace in its grip despite the invasion and partial occupation of the USSR's territory by Hitler's army.

In writing these sidelined individuals back into the history of the Great Fatherland War,⁹ which is how the Russians themselves call their portion of the worldwide conflict, Makine, as it will be my contention, has recourse to postmodern poetics that are indeed associated with a revisionist attitude towards official historical accounts, with giving voice to those previously silenced by the dominant discourse on the past, and with a personal and pluralistic attitude towards history. Also, as some contemporary philosophers of history, such as Hayden White, believe that any narrative — including the historian's — is necessarily subjective, incomplete, driven by the concerns of the present and politically motivated, postmodern novels set in the past routinely and overtly undermine the very possibility of establishing a univocal and reliable version of events.¹⁰ By displaying both the narrative techniques and thematic concerns found in postmodern historical fiction, Makine's novels potentially align themselves with those by contemporary French and francophone authors who not only demonstrate an increasingly obsessional interest in *les années noires*,¹¹ but also seem to create under the influence of postmodern philosophy of history

9 The term *Velikaya otechestvennaya voyna* can be translated into English as either 'Great Patriotic War' or 'Great Fatherland War'. Throughout this book I will be using the latter translation. In Russia, the term was first deployed on 23rd June 1941 in a *Pravda* article as a way of linking Hitler's unexpected attack to Russia's earlier defensive and victorious war, one against Napoleon. Allusions to the Fatherland War of 1812 had been made even earlier, when, nine hours after the launching of Operation Barbarossa, Foreign Minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, spoke of Russia's 1812 triumph over France as a guarantee that 'Victory will be ours'. Roger Markwick, 'The Great Patriotic War in Soviet and Post-Soviet Collective Memory', in *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History*, ed. by Dan Stone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 692–713 (p. 694). Cf. Alexis Peri, 'Revising the Past: History and Historical Memory during the Leningrad Blockade', *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 38 (2011), 105–29 (p. 108).

10 See, for example, Hayden White, 'The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory', *History and Theory*, 23.1 (February 1984), 1–33.

11 Margaret Attack and Christopher Lloyd, 'Introduction', in *Framing Narratives of the Second World War and Occupation in France, 1939–2009: New Readings*, ed. by Margaret Attack and Christopher Lloyd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 1–15 (p. 2).

and to deploy characteristically postmodern modes of writing. Among those are Patrick Modiano, Jonathan Littell, Philippe Claudel, Yannick Haenel, Soazig Aaron, Fabrice Humbert or Laurent Binet who all, as does Makine, probe little-known aspects of World War II and/or approach the conflict from new angles; all this while self-reflexively raising the question of accessing, appropriating and representing the past. Yet, despite sharing with Littell's *Les Bienveillantes* or Binet's *HHhH* both the interest in the last world war and postmodern self-awareness, Makine's fiction may differ from these contemporary World War II novels in terms of their politics, which is what the present study sets out to explore. By probing and problematizing the Franco-Russian author's portrayal of his homeland's involvement in the worldwide struggle against fascism, I will investigate here the interplay between Makine's poetics and ideological agenda that, as I will contend, may not always reflect the distrust of the prevailing narrative on the past or the dissent routinely associated with the postmodern historical inquiry.

Although Makine's novels could be regarded as symptomatic of the French novelists' recently renewed preoccupation with World War II, they can also be viewed as loyal to the tradition of the Soviet *belles lettres*. In fact, as soon as the fighting began in June 1941, the war started to feature prominently in literature, with dozens of novels and memoirs being churned out every year. Such literary production was admittedly encouraged by the communist authorities and at times, especially under Stalin, served state propaganda. Yet, as evidenced by post-Soviet cultural production, the theme of the Great Fatherland War has proven immune to socio-political changes, enjoying an enduring popularity in today's Russian literature, not to mention other arts such as the cinema.¹² 'Any Russian work that pretends to deal with the essentials of the twentieth century', states Deming Brown, 'has to somehow cope with it.'¹³

12 See, for example, Olga Kucherenko, 'That'll Teach'em to Love Their Motherland! Russian Youth Revisit the Battles of World War II', *The Journal of Power Institutions of Post-Soviet Societies*, 12 (2011) <<https://pipss.revues.org/3866>>; David Gillespie, 'Defence of the Realm: The "New" Russian Patriotism on Screen', *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-War Soviet Societies*, 3 (2005) <<http://pipss.revues.org/369?lang=en&gathStatIcon=true>>; and Birgit Beumers, 'Myth-making and Myth-taking: Lost Ideals and the War in Contemporary Russian Cinema', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 42.1–2 (March–June 2000), 171–88.

13 Deming Brown, 'World War II in Soviet Literature', in *The Impact of WWII on the Soviet Union*, ed. by Susan J. Linz (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985), pp. 243–51 (p. 243). For the representation of World War II in Soviet literature, see also Frank Ellis, *The Damned and the Dead: The Eastern Front through the Eyes of Soviet and Russian Novelists* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011); and Gregory Carleton, 'Russian Fiction at

While the Soviet 'récit de guerre' is likely to have borne an imprint on the Franco-Russian author's writing, so is postwar reality itself. Although Makine, who was born in 1957, did not know the war firsthand, he spent his childhood in a country that was still reeling from the immense human loss and other terrible consequences of the German invasion and partial occupation. Indeed, during the period of 1941–1945, much of the Soviet territory was ravaged and much of its industry, housing and infrastructure devastated,¹⁴ while some thirty million people lost their lives,¹⁵ which means that virtually no Soviet family escaped unscathed.¹⁶ If Makine's childhood coincided with the war's aftermath, his formative years overlapped with the development of the cult of the war. Established by Khrushchev, this saw its apogee under Brezhnev's administration. During that time the war, as Tumarkin explains, was turned into 'a sacrosanct cluster of heroic exploits that had once and for all proven the superiority of communism over capitalism.'¹⁷ Manifesting itself as grandiose monuments, bombastic celebrations of the Victory Day anniversaries, countless literary and cinematic representations of the war, as well as the military-patriotic upbringing of Soviet youth, the cult served to turn the nation's attention away from the country's difficult economic situation and to re-militarise the young generation that the authorities thought in danger of succumbing to the influence of Western youth movements.¹⁸ What the cult meant practically was that the whole Soviet culture was subordinated to the memory of the Russo-German conflict: propaganda, mass media, school education, state-wide rituals, popular songs, cinema, visual arts and literature all purveyed stereotyped and pre-interpreted images of Soviet heroism and sacrifice, any interrogation of which would have been regarded, in the words of sociologist Lev Gudkov, 'as a sacrilege, as an insult to the memory of the fallen, as blasphemy against

War', in *The Long Aftermath: Cultural Legacies of Europe at War, 1936–2016*, ed. by Manuel Bragança and Peter Tame (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), pp. 358–72.

14 Elena Zubkova, *Russia and the War: Hopes, Illusions and Disappointments 1945–1957*, trans. by Hugh Ragsdale (New York: M. E. Sharp, 1998), p. 20. See also Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 96.

15 Stalin's original assessment of seven to eight million victims was replaced in the 1950s by seventeen million. In 1961 Khrushchev spoke of twenty million, which was the official figure until the number rose to thirty million under Gorbachev. Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 135. See also Zubkova, p. 20.

16 Mark Harrison, *Accounting for War: Soviet Production, Employment, and the Defence Burden, 1940–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 159–61.

17 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 133.

18 *Idem*.

the highest national values.¹⁹ Given his personal situation, Makine's exposure to the war cult must have been even more intense than that of his peers who, like Alyosha and Arkady of the author's second novel, *Confession d'un porteur de drapeau déchu*, were privy to their parents' personal experience of the front and the rear, and who could thus distance themselves from the official version of the war. Conversely, as an orphan, Makine would have had limited access to such testimonies, as have indeed some of his parentless heroes, such as those in *Requiem pour l'Est* or *La Terre et le ciel de Jacques Dorme*.

Indeed, like many of the central characters of his undeniably autobiographically-inspired novels, Makine lost his parents early, though when exactly and in what circumstances is unclear.²⁰ In fact, apart from the author's date and place of birth, which in themselves have been subject to polemics,²¹ little is known about the life of a man who, while happy to talk to journalists, remains highly discreet about his past or deliberately misleads his interviewers by providing them with mutually contradictory information.²² Consequently, many facts concerning Makine's biography belong to the realm of conjecture; for example, critics speculate that Makine grew up under the influence of an older French-speaking woman, whose reflection is found in characters such as Olga (*Au temps du fleuve Amour*), Charlotte Lemonnier (*Le Testament français*), Shura (*Requiem pour l'Est*) or Alexandra (*La Terre et le ciel de Jacques Dorme*).²³ This grandmotherly figure is thought to have instilled in the future novelist the love of the Hexagon's language and culture, which in turn led him to pursue his study of French at university level. Having completed a degree at the University of Kalinin, in 1985 Makine defended a doctoral thesis on the representation of childhood in contemporary French literature at the University of Moscow, and then taught at the Pedagogical Institute in Novgorod. In interviews Makine also mentions his military service in Afghanistan,²⁴ an experience reflected in his

19 Lev Gudkov, 'The Fetters of Victory: How the War Provides Russia with Its Identity', *Eurozine* <<http://www.eurozine.com/pdf/2005-05-03-gudkov-en.pdf>>.

20 Murielle Lucie Clément, 'Introduction', in *Le Monde selon Andreï Makine*, ed. by Clément and Caratozzolo, pp. 5–12 (p. 5).

21 Some biographical notes give Penza, others mention Krasnoyarsk, Divnogorsk or Novgorod.

22 In the interview with Tim Martin Makine suggests that 'Andreï Makine' is a false identity. Tim Martin, 'Interview with Andrei Makine', *Telegraph*, 16 April 2013 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/9986647/Andrei-Makine-interview.html>>.

23 See, for example, Nina Nazarova, *Andreï Makine: Deux facettes de son oeuvre* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), p. 13.

24 Guylaine Massoutre, 'Andreï Makine: polémique sur les valeurs françaises', *Le Devoir*, 1 mars 2014 <<http://www.ledevoir.com/culture/livres/401418/andrei-makine-polemique-sur-les-valeurs-francaises>>.

novels and linked by some to the writer's alleged involvement in espionage.²⁵ Although there is no concrete evidence of Makine having been a KGB agent, if confirmed, this fact would elucidate the author's puzzling defection to the West in 1987, which he himself rather unconvincingly explains now as motivated by his loathing for capitalist Russia, and now as provoked by the incompatibility of his personal experience of the Soviets' incursion in Afghanistan with the official and heavily sanitised version of the conflict. In reality, at the time of Makine's emigration Russia was still far from being a capitalist state, while the fact that *perestroika* was already in full swing meant that the future writer would not have had to fear persecution for speaking openly about the Afghan war, especially given his position of a successful and, as Nina Nazarova suggests, conforming academic.²⁶

In contrast to Makine's life in Russia, more details are available concerning his French trajectory. We know that he arrived in Paris as a political refugee and that during the initial years of his exile he made a number of unsuccessful applications for French citizenship, while at times suffering extreme financial hardship or even, as he himself has claimed, homelessness. Whatever the reasons for and circumstances of his emigration, shortly after arriving in Paris (where he still lives), Makine started teaching Russian part-time at the prestigious École Polytechnique and studying the oeuvre of Ivan Bunin at the Sorbonne. While preparing a doctorate on the Nobel Prize-winning Russian novelist,²⁷ Makine embarked on a writer's career. Yet, as reflected by the semi-autobiographical *Le Testament français* and *La Terre et le ciel de Jacques Dorme*, his path to recognition was thorny and tortuous. Unfazed by a string of refusals, Makine kept sending the manuscript of his debut novel to publishers until he managed to have it accepted, though only by pretending it was a French translation of a Russian text. Like *La Fille d'un Héros de l'Union soviétique*, his two subsequent works of fiction, *Confession d'un porte-drapeau déchu* (still published as a translation from the Russian) and *Au temps du fleuve Amour*, passed virtually unnoticed. Makine's consecration came only with *Le Testament français* that in 1995 won the unprecedented trio of literary prizes: the Prix Goncourt, the Prix Médicis and the Prix de Goncourt des Lycéens. Presented as based on the author's personal experience and thematising a Russian boy's fascination with French language and

25 Adrian Wanner, 'Andreï Makine: "Seeing Russia in French"', in *Out of Russia: Fictions of a New Translingual Diaspora* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011), pp. 19–49 (p. 24).

26 Nazarova, p. 16.

27 Andreï Makine 'La Prose de I. A. Bounine: Poétique de la nostalgie' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université Paris-Sorbonne (Paris IV), 1991).

culture, in the eyes of the Parisian literati the novel legitimated Makine's claim to his place among French writers. According to some, it also contributed to his long-awaited naturalisation as French citizen.²⁸ Since then, the author who — it must be stressed — writes exclusively in his adopted language, has been impressively prolific, producing further novels with astonishing regularity and trying his hand at other literary genres.²⁹ Additionally, as recently revealed, Makine had been creating a parallel oeuvre under the *nom de plume* of Gabriel Osmonde.³⁰ Translated into over thirty languages and awarded other literary prizes,³¹ Makine's books have been enjoying — despite (or perhaps thanks to!) their somewhat sequential character — continuing popularity; and this is not only in France but also in other countries, including the English-speaking world, which Makine's novels reach in Geoffrey Strachan's excellent translations.³² Needless to say, the unprecedented success of *Le Testament français* sparked a flurry of critical works on the Franco-Russian author's oeuvre; since 1995, Makine criticism has been developing in proportion to the growth of the writer's own oeuvre, his works being the subject of academic conferences, journal articles, volumes of essays, conference presentations and monographs. Yet, in contrast to the enthusiastic reception of Makine's work in the West, in Russia his novels have been practically unknown, despite — or maybe precisely because of — the fact that they deal almost exclusively with

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- 28 Véronique Porra, 'Un Russe en Atlantide: Andreï Makine, du discours littéraire à la citoyenneté', János Riesz and Véronique Porra (eds), *Français et Francophones: Tendances centrifuges et centripètes dans les littératures françaises/francophones d'aujourd'hui* (Bayreuth: Schultzs & Stellmacher, 1998), pp. 67–85.
- 29 Makine's only play so far is *Le Monde selon Gabriel: Mystère de Noël* (Paris: Rocher, 2007). His essays include the collection *Cette France qu'on oublie d'aimer* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006) and 'La Question française', *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, 517 (February 1996), 4–19. He has also co-authored with Ferrante Ferranti a guide to St Petersburg (*Saint Pétersbourg* (Paris: La Chêne, 2002)), and with Elena Maldevskaïa a book on traditional Russian dress (*Le Costume populaire russe* (Paris: Connaissance des Arts, 2009)).
- 30 It was in 2011 when, after a French scholar had observed similarities between *20,000 femmes dans la vie d'un homme* and *Le Testament français*, that Makine came clean about writing under a pen name. For more details, see Astrid de Larminat, 'Osmonde sort de l'ombre', *Le Figaro*, 30 March 2011 <<http://www.lefigaro.fr/livres/2011/03/30/03005-20110330ARTFIG00656-osmonde-sort-de-l-ombre.php>>.
- 31 Among the awards Makine has received are the Prix RTL for *La Musique d'une vie* (2001), the Prix de la Fondation Prince de Monaco (2005) for the entirety of his oeuvre, and the Prix Wartburg de Littérature for *Le Pays du lieutenant Schreiber* (2014). In 2016, Makine was elected a member of the Académie française.
- 32 In 1988 Geoffrey Strachan was awarded the Scott Moncrieff Prize for his translation of *Le Testament français*.

the author's homeland. Apart from *Le Testament français*, which, available to Russian readers in an abridged version, met with some lukewarm and some openly hostile reviews, none of Makine's works have so far been translated into the author's native language.³³

It would not be an overstatement to say that all of Makine's novels, except those he wrote as Gabriel Osmonde, deal in some way with Russia's past. In his career the author has taken interest in events both distant and recent, including Russia's sixteenth-century conquest of Eastern Siberia (*Au temps du fleuve Amour*), the reign of Catherine the Great (*Une femme aimée*), the October Revolution and the ensuing Civil War (*Le Crime d'Olga Arbélina*), the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (*Confession d'un porte-drapeau déchu*), the Soviet involvement in the Angola War of Independence (*L'Amour humain*), Gorbachev's reforms, known as *glasnost* and *perestroika* (*La Fille d'un Héros de l'Union soviétique*) and, finally, *perekhod*, as the Russians call their country's transformation from communism to capitalism during the early 1990s (*Une femme aimée*).

Makine's preoccupation with the past means that his works could be classified as historical literature, a genre which was born with the rise of European nationalism during the first half of the nineteenth century and which enjoyed great popularity until the onset of modernism, before having been recently reinvented by postmodern writers. It is worth adding that, just like in Western Europe, historical literature flourished in Makine's homeland, where it developed in the wake of Walter Scott's writings and where, serving similar ends as in the West, it became a platform for discussing the issue of Russian identity.³⁴ Likewise, in both Western European and Russian contexts the historical novel was seen as an awkward genre, as, although in many languages the words for

33 Translated by two different people and counting merely eighty-five pages, the book was printed by the review *Inostrannaya literatura* [*Foreign Literature*]. Some reviews were negative, including that by the influential novelist and critic Tatyana Tolstoya ('Ruskii chelovek na rendez-vous', *Znamia*, 6 (1998), 200–9). For more on the Russian reception of Makine's oeuvre, see Ruth Louise Diver, 'Andreï Makine Disinherited: The Russian Reception of *Le Testament français*' (unpublished masters thesis, University of Auckland, 2003); Valéria Pery Borissov, 'La Position paradoxale d'Andreï Makine dans le champ littéraire russe', *Communication, lettres et sciences du langage*, 4.1 (July 2010), 42–61; Stéphanie Bellemare-Page, 'Par-delà l'histoire: Regards sur l'identité et la mémoire dans l'oeuvre d'Andreï Makine' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université Laval, 2010), pp. 118–19; Wanner, 'Andreï Makine: "Seeing Russia in French" '; and David Gillespie, 'Bartavels, Orlolans, and Borshch: France and Russia in the Fictional Worlds of Andreï Makine', *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies*, 24.1–2 (2010), 1–18 (pp. 3–5).

34 Dan Ungurianu, *Plotting History: The Russian Historical Novel in the Imperial Age* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2007), pp. 13–21.

'history' and 'story' are the same or very similar, it compromised the Aristotelian distinction between the true and the verisimilar.³⁵ No easier than the task of reconciling fact and fiction has been the task of defining historical literature. While György Lukács, who tried to rescue the genre's reputation, thought all fiction to be inherently historical in that it concerns social currents and forces that are the products of historical antecedents,³⁶ others define the historical novel as a work based on 'research rather than personal experience' and as set 'before the author's life and times,'³⁷ or at least as dealing with an era 'that is viewed by contemporaries as a different epoch'.³⁸ According to other characterisations of the genre, the qualifier 'historical' presupposes the presence of a more or less concrete chronotope.³⁹ This means that the action of a historical novel must be set against a realistic background and its plot must include at least one real historical figure and a number of historical events mingled with and affecting the personal fortunes of its protagonists.⁴⁰ In addition, these fictional characters must represent men in general; that is, they must be conceived as historical beings who are subject to the forces of one historical age or another.⁴¹

Even a cursory glance at Makine's writing suffices to see that it fulfils the afore-listed conditions, including the archetypal nature of its fictional

35 For Alessandro Manzoni, a prominent historical writer, the novel set in the past was 'inherently contradictory' and therefore unstable and flawed. It is 'a work impossible to achieve satisfactorily' and deficient as both history and literature. Alessandro Manzoni, *On the Historical Novel, and, in General, on Works Mixing History and Invention*, trans. by Sandra L. Bermann (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), p. 72. Expressing the same idea more bluntly, Russian literary critic Ossip Senkovsky proclaimed the historical novel a 'bastard son without family or tribe', 'the fruit of history's flagrant adultery with imagination' and a 'false form of art'. Quoted by Ungurianu, p. 3.

36 David Cowart, *History and the Contemporary Novel* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), p. 4.

37 Sarah, L. Johnson, *Historical Fiction: A Guide to the Genre* (Westport: Libraries Unlimited, 2005), p. 1. This position is shared by Avrom Fleishman who states that a historical novel must be set some forty to sixty years back. Additionally, Fleishman distinguishes between 'historical novels proper' and 'novels of the recent past' that are set in the previous and present generations of which the writer has direct experience. Avrom Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), p. 3.

38 Ungurianu, p. 11. To illustrate this point, the critic notes that in Russia historical novels were being written about the Napoleonic era as early as the 1830s.

39 *Ibidem*, p. 10.

40 Fleishman, pp. 3–4.

41 *Ibidem*, p. 11.

characters or the presence of historical events and personages, although these, with the exception of Catherine the Great, tend to exist in the background in the author's prose. For, if Makine's novels narrate stories of supposedly typical Soviet women and men who are shown to be at the mercy of overwhelming historical forces, they stage well-known events, such as the battle of Moscow, the siege of Leningrad or the capture of Berlin, and familiar personages such as Lavrenti Beria (*Le Testament français*), Georgy Malenkov (*La Vie d'un homme inconnu*), or Stalin himself (*Requiem pour l'Est*). Moreover, as we will see from my analyses, by styling himself, as Adrian Wanner aptly observes, as a moralist,⁴² Makine shares the ambition of classical historical authors, such as Scott, Leo Tolstoy or Henryk Sienkiewicz, of contributing to the readers' moral edification while propagating knowledge about the past.⁴³ Finally, even if today many judge Lukács's approach to literature as ideologically tendentious, limited, naïve or simply outmoded,⁴⁴ the link between historical fiction and (nostalgic) nationalism that the Marxist philosopher posited may be relevant also to Makine's writing.⁴⁵ This is because, as this book will demonstrate, the Franco-Russian novelist's work may be seen as a reaction to the uncertainties of the present, in particular to his homeland's post-1991 tribulations, and as motivated by the author's desire to reinforce in the eyes of his Western readers Russia's historical identity and prestige.

Yet, despite numerous affinities between Makine's writing and the novel à la Walter Scott, which represented the past as an orderly and meaningful process, relying on the ideal of impartiality also cherished by historicism,⁴⁶ the Franco-Russian author's work resolutely undermines the notion of anonymous and objective history, questions the univocal character or even the existence of

42 Wanner, 'Andreï Makine: "Seeing Russia in French"', p. 41. See also Valeria Pery-Borissov, 'Paratopie et entretien littéraire: Andreï Makine et Nancy Huston ou l'écrivain exilé dans le champ littéraire', *Argumentation et analyse du discours. La revue électronique du groupe ADARR*, 12 (2014) <<https://aad.revues.org/1629#tocto2n3>> (para. 26 of 68).

43 Elisabeth Wesseling, *Writing History as a Prophet: Postmodernist Innovations in a Historical Novel* (Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 1991), p. 46.

44 Ursula Brumm, 'Thoughts on History and the Novel', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 6.3 (1969), 313–30 (p. 320).

45 For Lukács, the historical novel became a tool for seeking consolation in the past and assuaging nostalgia for the old. In the case of nations whose collective identity was being threatened through political and economic fragmentation (Germany), or through loss of sovereignty (Poland), it was, additionally, a way of asserting their historical continuity and identity. Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London: Penguin, 1963).

46 Wesseling, p. 70.

historical truth, systematically shows our interest in and understanding of the past to be determined by the concerns of the present, and flaunts the inevitable textuality of our historical knowledge. Makine's novels do so by challenging the traditional principles of narrative construction; more specifically, they employ such literary devices as multiple narrative frames and self-reflexivity, while mostly refusing the omniscience and omnipresence of the third person, instead narrating the past from a subjective and avowedly limited perspective. Such a departure from the well worn-out model of historical literature means that rather than exemplifying the paradigm established by Scott, Makine's writings come under the heading of postmodern historical fiction, a relatively recently-emerged phenomenon that has been theorised by, among others, Patricia Waugh, Brian McHale, Elisabeth Wesseling or Linda Hutcheon. More specifically, in the present book I will argue that Makine's writing bears hallmarks of 'historiographic metafiction', which is how Hutcheon has rebranded postmodern literature, thus foregrounding its keen interest in the past and metafictional interrogating of the very convention it is using. Other categories that the Canadian theorist attaches to these 'well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages',⁴⁷ and which she exemplifies with Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*, Gabriel García Márquez's *Hundred Years of Solitude* or Jonathan Swift's *Waterland*, are anti-totalisation, discontinuity, de-centering and indeterminacy.⁴⁸ Also, in contrast to renowned critics of postmodernism, such as Terry Eagleton or Fredric Jameson, who deny postmodern art not only genuine historicity but also political potential, Hutcheon insists on the ideological underpinning of historiographic metafiction, stating that 'postmodernism and politics make curious, if inevitable, bedfellows'.⁴⁹ Ultimately, for Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction is, like the rest of postmodern art, inherently self-contradictory, as it simultaneously undermines the very concepts it inscribes, although it is not to reject or explode, but rather to problematise them.⁵⁰ The paradoxical nature of historiographic metafiction is perhaps most poignantly fleshed out by its attitude towards the genre which it parodies and which, in doing so, it both uses and abuses, thus criticising what it is profoundly implicated in.⁵¹

47 Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (Oxford: Routledge, 1988), p. 5.

48 *Ibidem*, p. 3.

49 Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 2.

50 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. xii.

51 *Ibidem*, p. 23.

Before I discuss the influence of postmodern philosophy and poetics on Makine's writing in the following five chapters, it must be articulated that despite its undeniable roots in French poststructuralism and deconstruction, and notably in the output of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze or Jacques Derrida,⁵² not to mention Lyotard's influential essay *La Condition postmoderne*,⁵³ postmodernism has been barely theorised in France.⁵⁴ Likewise, although it is beyond all doubt that recent French prose has been under the influence of contemporary Anglo-American both philosophy of history and literature, as evidenced by the work of Michel Tournier, Patrick Modiano, Jean Echenoz or Jean Philippe Toussaint, it is rarely discussed in terms of its postmodern quality. Antoine Compagnon elucidates this phenomenon by noticing that French critics are sceptical of the American-imported theory⁵⁵ and, in Marc Gontard's view, hold in contempt a cultural practice that they associate with ludic playfulness, pastiche, irony or even superficiality:⁵⁶ '[l]e post-moderne suscite' ['[p]ostmodernism provokes'], writes Compagnon, 'd'autant plus de scepticisme en France que nous ne l'avons pas inventé, alors que nous nous faisons passer pour les pères de la modernité et de l'avant-garde, comme des droits de l'homme' ['all the more scepticism in France because the French did not invent it, yet we pass ourselves off as the inventors of modernity and the avant-garde, as we do of the rights of man.']⁵⁷

52 Stuart Sim, 'Postmodernism and Philosophy', in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. by Stuart Sim (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 3–14.

53 Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Minuit, 1979).

54 The few theoretical works include: Marc Gontard, *Écrire la crise: L'esthétique postmoderne* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013); Sophie Bertho 'L'Attente postmoderne: À propos de la littérature contemporaine en France', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 4–5 (July–October 1991), 735–43; Sophie Bertho, 'Temps, récit et postmodernité', *Littérature*, 92 (1993), 90–97; André Lamontagne, 'Du modernisme au postmodernisme: Le sort de l'intertexte français dans le roman québécois contemporain', *Voix et images*, 20.1 (1994), 162–75; Garry Madison, 'Visages de la postmodernité', *Études littéraires*, 27.1 (1994), 113–37; Ginette Michaud, 'Récits postmodernes?', *Études françaises*, 21.3 (1985), 67–88; Lionel Ruffel, 'Le Début, la fin, le dénouement: Comment nommer le postmoderne? (France–États-Unis)', *Fabula/Les Colloques* <<http://www.fabula.org/colloques/documents775.php>>; Aaron Kibédi Varga, 'Le Récit postmoderne', *Littérature* (February 1990), 3–22.

55 Antoine Compagnon, *Les Cinq Paradoxes de la modernité* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), p. 146.

56 Gontard, p. 8.

57 Compagnon, p. 146. The translation comes from *Five Paradoxes of Modernity*, trans. by Franklin Philip (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

Anglo-American or French in origin, postmodernism has been routinely seen as a by-product of the Western political and economic climate,⁵⁸ yet, it is not a solely Western phenomenon. It transpires that the uniqueness of Russia's twentieth-century political trajectory has not precluded the presence of postmodernism in Makine's homeland,⁵⁹ although some critics wonder, as does Marjorie Perloff, whether Russian postmodernism is not an oxymoron,⁶⁰ while others interrogate the possibility of classifying any Russian art as postmodern. Among the latter is Mark Lipovetsky who points out that postmodernism has been seen as a phenomenon of late capitalism,⁶¹ as a corollary of the end of history logic,⁶² or as a product of a consumerist, media-driven society dominated by kitsch and simulacra, and experiencing a demise of strong referentials including history.⁶³ He also notes that the political engagement, not to say the 'heroic' quality, of Russian postmodernism of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s rendered it closer to the avant-garde rebellion of modernism than to 'postmodernist indifference [*sic*]'.⁶⁴ That said, the critic notices a number of parallels between Western postmodern art and its Russian equivalent that, he claims, has two distinct strands: the continuation of the Moscow conceptualism of the late 1960s and early 1970s,⁶⁵ and the neo-baroque. As for the former, it was,

58 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Terry Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. by David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988), pp. 385–98.

59 On Russian postmodernism see, for example, Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 215–82; Evgeny Dobrenko, 'Utopias of Return: Notes on (Post-)Soviet Culture and Its Frustrated (Post-)modernisation', *Studies in East European Thought*, 63 (2011), 159–71; Mikhail Epstein, *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture* (Amherst: Massachusetts University Press, 1995); *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture*, ed. by Mikhail Epstein, Alexander Genis and Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999); Mark Lipovetsky, *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharp, 1999).

60 Marjorie Perloff, 'Russian Postmodernism: An Oxymoron?', *Postmodern Culture*, 3.2 (1993).

61 Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

62 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992).

63 Jean Baudrillard, *La Société de consommation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970) and *Simulacres et simulation* (Paris: Galilé, 1981).

64 Mark Lipovetsky, 'Russian Literary Postmodernism in the 1990s', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 79.1 (January 2001), 31–50 (p. 32).

65 Sharing Lipovetsky's view, Epstein thus defines Moscow Conceptualism: 'influential artistic and intellectual movements that transformed the Soviet ideological system into material for parody and pastiche, often characterised also by a lyrical and nostalgic attitude.'

in Mikhail Epstein's terms, 'theoretically self-conscious, presuming a premeditated and ironic attitude toward the language of ideas',⁶⁶ 'offer[ing] a radical challenge to totalitarian claims of absolute truth' and constituting 'an ironic imitation and inversion of the solipsistic activity of the collective supermind'.⁶⁷ Further strengthening the link between postmodernism and conceptualism, Lipovetsky uses the Baudrillardian idea of simulacra in order to argue that 'the Socialist Realist overproduction of ideological images that replaced reality for the absolute majority of the Soviet people, can be compared with postmodernist simulation generated by the mass-media and the Internet'.⁶⁸ As for the neo-baroque strand of Russian postmodernism, Lipovetsky defines it as a mix of mass and high-brow cultures, and describes it as characterised by 1) repetition as a structural mechanism, 2) excess ('excessive sexuality, violence, horror, general monstrosity of characters and situations'), 3) fragment, 4) domination of 'formless forms', 5) chaotic or labyrinthine narrative, and 6) 'constructed undecidability'.⁶⁹

Contrary to Lipovetsky or Perloff, Svetlana Boym does not hesitate to speak of Russian postmodernism and sees the 1991 attempted *coup d'état* as its utmost expression.⁷⁰ Televised, the failed putsch, which Boym views more as a carnival than a real revolution, supported Baudrillard's idea that 'in the era of TV domination we always live already *après coup* [...] for we live in the age of global indifference, with a permanent power shortage'.⁷¹ Boym then quotes a Russian art critic for whom the putsch, which — aptly — was staged near the entrance to Barricade Metro station and practically on the spot that had been the theatre of earlier revolts yet reversing their values, was 'a gigantic performance' and a 'typical postmodern revolution'.⁷² Finally, Boym cites opinions that it was the Russians who invented postmodernism, and in particular its apocalyptic strain. This is because the Russians were the first to experience 'fatal banality' and simulacra, later to be described by Baudrillard, who, coincidentally, is the most popular postmodern theoretician among Russian intellectuals: 'In their view Socialist Realism is seen as a kind of postmodernism *avant*

Mikhail Epstein, 'The Philosophical Implications of Russian Conceptualism', *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 1.1 (2010), 64–71 (p. 64).

66 *Ibidem*, p. 65.

67 *Ibidem*, p. 66.

68 Lipovetsky, 'Russian Literary Postmodernism in the 1990s', p. 34.

69 *Ibidem*, pp. 39–40.

70 Also known as the August putsch, the coup was an attempt by a group of hard-line government members to take control of the country and overthrow Mikhail Gorbachev.

71 Boym, *Common Places*, p. 220.

72 *Ibidem*, p. 221.

la lettre that came literally after the official destruction of Russian modernism, but inherited some of its utopian claims.⁷³

If Boym's discussion ends with the 1991 putsch being turned into a simulacrum, Boris Noordenbos focuses on more recent developments in Russian postmodernism. Stressing its plurality and heterogeneity, the critic considers contemporary postmodern Russian fiction as a continuation of the literature of the Silver Age;⁷⁴ as a reflection on the ruins of Socialist Realism; as the culmination of the tradition of 'ideological simulation of reality'; or, finally, as a concept imported from the West.⁷⁵ Known as 'imperial literature', the latest trend in Russian postmodern fiction, has, as Noordenbos demonstrates, an ideological edge. Unlike their predecessors who indulged in 'irony, mockery, and pretentious intellectual games', the 'new political writers'⁷⁶ strip postmodernism of its erstwhile 'relativist, anti-Soviet, and pro-Western aura', in order to incorporate postmodern genres and tropes into a political programme that proposes to address Russia's problems by autocratic, totalitarian or imperial means.⁷⁷

This brief outline of Russia's postmodern culture is not without relevance to my readings of Makine's novels; while, from the formal perspective, these may be closer to Western than to Russian postmodern literature with its experimental and aesthetically provocative edge,⁷⁸ and, in Lipovetsky's view, its radical anti-historical outlook,⁷⁹ they evidently share some of the concerns of Russian postmodern writers. Notably, the pining for a strong Russia — be it communist or tsarist — that is immune to Western-imported ideas, such as liberal democracy or free market economy, which underpins Makine's novels, seems to echo the themes addressed by the 'new political writers', who have been, in Noordenbos's view, (mis)using postmodern narrative strategies in order to propagate neo-traditionalist ideals. To put it differently, like his Russian coevals, Makine may be voicing with the help of contemporary aesthetics what Serguei Oushatkine has defined as 'patriotism of despair'.⁸⁰ The American-based soci-

73 *Ibidem*, p. 223.

74 A term usually applied to Russian literature of the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century.

75 Boris Noordenbos, 'Ironie Imperialism: How Russian Patriots Are Reclaiming Postmodernism', *Studies in East European Thought*, 63 (2011), 147–158 (p. 149).

76 The authors discussed by Noordenbos are Aleksander Pokhanov or Pavel Krusanov.

77 Noordenbos, p. 149.

78 *Idem*.

79 Lipovetsky, 'Russian Literary Postmodernism in the 1990s', p. 32.

80 Serguei Oushatkine, *Patriotism of Despair: Nation, War and Loss in Russia* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009).

ologist attaches this phenomenon to the post-Soviet sense of dislocation that translates itself into a 'tendency to achieve a sense of belonging by framing the nation's history as one of experienced, imagined, or anticipated traumatic events'.⁸¹ Indeed, as we will see in the present study, with his prose Makine articulates a nostalgia for a lost wholeness and identity, as well as anti-Western sentiments, which find expression in his novels' reverential attitude towards the Great Fatherland War as a moment of, on the one hand, national unity and, on the other, triumph, both military and moral, over the West.

Significantly, the USSR's victory over Hitler constituted the central myth of the Soviet metanarrative that Lipovetsky compares to the totalising and violent *grands récits* of the Enlightenment. These, according to Lyotard, legitimated scientific knowledge throughout modernity, before losing their currency with the onset of postmodernism.⁸² Following Boris Groys,⁸³ Lipovetsky likens communist ideology to the utopian project of modernity, 'Soviet civilisation [being] a particular — hypertrophied and pathological — version of the legitimisation of the period of modernity'.⁸⁴ The critic thus implicitly analogises the Soviet metanarrative to the narratives of emancipation (as seen in the politics of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment) and the totality of knowledge (as seen in Hegelianism and Marxism), which, in Lyotard's view, portrayed history as a meaningful, directed process.⁸⁵ Hence, if Western postmodernism is about questioning the Lyotardian *grands récits*, Russian postmodernism is, in Boym's opinion, about the loss of the 'main metanarrative of sovietology'.⁸⁶ The latter's disappearance is both liberating and frightening, for it has created 'a perception of loss of Soviet communality and of the unified Soviet cultural text'.⁸⁷ For Graeme Gill, who defines a metanarrative as a cluster of myths which form a simplified version of ideology, are the vehicle for communication between a regime and those who live under it, and offer a symbolic construction and a projection of society that explain both current reality and future trajectory,⁸⁸ until the 1960s the Soviet metanarrative was

81 *Ibidem*, p. 5.

82 Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, p. 7.

83 Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, trans. by Charles Rougle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

84 Lipovetsky, *Russian Postmodernist Fiction*, p. 5.

85 Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, p. 54.

86 Boym, *Common Places*, p. 224.

87 *Idem*. See also Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), pp. 57–71.

88 Graeme Gill, *Symbols and Legitimacy in Soviet Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 3.

about building a socialist society with the view of achieving its final goal — a perfect communist state — on the basis of the 1917 Revolution. Thus, it closely resembled other modernist *grands récits* that presented history as an orderly, logical and goal-oriented process leading to emancipation, equality and general happiness of the populace. During the late 1960s and 1970s, however, the Great Fatherland War became the foundational myth of the Soviet state: while retrospectively justifying the existence of the first communist country in the world, Soviet Russia's victory over Nazi Germany proved its moral, economic and military advantage over the capitalist West.⁸⁹ Being simultaneously presented as a major event in Russian (rather than only Soviet) history⁹⁰ and endowed with both a pan-Soviet quality and the status of a foundation event of the first socialist state, the war has been, in Elisabeth Wood's formulation, 'an event of mythic proportions that underlies the unity and coherence of the nation [and] gives it legitimacy as a world power'.⁹¹ It is also a moment 'that is simultaneously timeless and rooted in time, that involves suffering and redemption, trauma and recovery from trauma [and] creation of community'.⁹²

The present study will show that Makine's fiction offers itself as disruptive in relation to the Soviet master narrative, and especially to its two central myths: the utopian promise of a radiant future awaiting Soviet society as soon as it has reached the stage of communism, and the official conception of the past focused around the legacy of the Great Fatherland War.⁹³ Considering this book's central focus, I will concentrate primarily on the author's critical position on the 'bronzed saga' of the war, which, to paraphrase Tumarkin, neglected the dead and wounded, instead placing emphasis on the genius of Stalin, the wise leadership of the Party, the sacrifices of the Red Army and the steadfastness of the Soviet people.⁹⁴ If, aligning itself with the politics of historiographic metafiction, Makine's prose seems to aim 'to restore history and memory in

89 *Ibidem*, p. 274.

90 This was achieved, for example, with the name 'Great Fatherland War' which related the Soviet Union's struggle against Hitler to Napoleon's 1812 invasion of Russia, or with Stalin's speech of 7 November 1941 which hailed the most famed military heroes from the country's pre-Soviet past: Alexander Nevsky, Aleksander Suvorov or Mikhail Kutuzov. Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 63.

91 Elisabeth A. Wood, 'Performing Memory: Vladimir Putin and the Celebration of World War II in Russia', *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 38 (2011), 172–200 (p. 174).

92 *Idem*.

93 The other myths listed by Graeme Gill are 1) Myth of regime founding, 2) Myth of leadership, 3) Myth of internal opposition, and 4) Myth of external opposition. Gill, p. 264.

94 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 188, p. 190, p. 193.

the face of the distortions of the “history of forgetting”;⁹⁵ it does so by de-throning the dominating narrative of triumph and glory. Instead, it favours the Lyotardian ‘*petits récits*’;⁹⁶ which have been defined as ‘localised representations of restricted domains, none of which has a claim to universal truth status.’⁹⁷ In postmodern historiography or literature, these ‘little narratives’ belong to those who, as Simon Malpas has it, ‘cannot represent themselves’ and whose desires and self-images are unknowable.’⁹⁸ Should this postmodern practice be situated in the context of Soviet memory politics, it would mean precisely the writing back into the history of the Great Fatherland War of those whose bravery and sacrifices were dwarfed by the overarching narrative of the Great Victory and whose ‘noble names’, to quote Berggolts again, ‘we cannot enumerate’. Indeed, Makine’s novels systematically narrate stories of women and men who, having been brutalised by not only Nazi but also Soviet violence, never had their contribution to the struggle against the German invader properly acknowledged. In this sense, the Franco-Russian author’s writing potentially inscribes itself into the postmodern drive from the discredited *grands récits* towards the more modest and localised micro-narratives, or, in other words, into the move from ‘History’ towards ‘histories’, which Jeffrey Cox and Larry Reynolds define as ‘an ongoing series of human constructions each representing the past at particular present moments for particular purposes.’⁹⁹ What remains to be seen is to what degree the ‘history from below’, to borrow Georges Lefebvre’s term,¹⁰⁰ and the ‘memory from above’,¹⁰¹ as Alon Confino has called ‘the past constructed not as fact but as myth to serve the interest of a particular community’,¹⁰² remain enmeshed in Makine’s writing as they

95 Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 129.

96 Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, p. 89.

97 Daniel Chandler and Rod Munday, *Dictionary of Media and Communication* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 178.

98 Simon Malpas, *The Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 103.

99 Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds, ‘Introduction: The Historical Enterprise’, in *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, ed. by Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 3–38 (p. 4).

100 E. P. Thompson, ‘History from Below’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 April 1966, pp. 279–80. The term had been first used by French historian Georges Lefebvre in relation to the French Revolution. Georges Lefebvre, *La Grande Peur de 1789* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1932).

101 Alon Confino, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems and Method’, *American History Review*, 102.5 (December 1997), 1386–403 (p. 1394).

102 *Ibidem*, p. 1387.

are indeed in the actual war memory, as articulated, for example, by the Piskarevskoye Cemetery where the private and the public memories interact with each other. More specifically, my objective will be to evaluate to what extent the war veterans' *petits récits* become a means for Makine of reconstituting the overthrown — or at least shaken — Soviet metanarrative, whereby the author's prose would be reversing the anti-totalising and de-centering processes at the heart of historiographic metafiction, and, in correlation, undermining the very principle of postmodernism, as spelt out by Lyotard.

By reframing Makine's oeuvre with theories of postmodernism, which, as stated earlier, occupy a marginal position in French literary criticism, the present book offers a fresh approach to the work of the Franco-Russian writer, as it would do indeed if its object was the prose of any other French novelist. Yet, the originality, pertinence and timeliness of my analyses of Makine's fiction go beyond its theoretical underpinning, as the repositioning of the writer's work in the context of postmodernism will only provide a springboard for the present book's guiding inquiry, which is one into Makine's representation of World War II and its ideological agenda. To put it differently, my key argument will attach itself to Makine's commitment to postmodernism and its essentially radical attitude towards History, which I will test by examining the novelist's depiction of the Great Fatherland War through the stories of its neglected participants. To achieve this, I will read Makine's novels against two historical discourses on the war, which are the official Soviet narrative, recently revived by the Putin administration, and both Western and post-Soviet historical sources, including private testimonies. And, although the latter are frequently tainted by propaganda, they still offer a more personal and more candid view of the past than the official record. Yet, this study does not limit itself to evaluating the historical accuracy of Makine's novels, which, while being exemplars of historical literature and overtly claiming to be delivering more, epistemologically, than historiography, remain — it must be remembered — fictional texts. Consequently, unlike a historian, Makine benefits from the privilege of creative licence and cannot be held accountable for his writing in the same way a historian can be. In any case, given my specialism in literature and not history, I am more interested in exploring the typically postmodern narrative modes present in Makine's fiction and the use to which the author puts them; in other words, what will retain my attention in the following chapters is the correspondence between Makine's aesthetics and the political message his writing vehicles, and the implication of this correspondence — or indeed of its lack — for Hutcheon's overwhelmingly positive conception of historiographic metafiction and, more generally, of postmodernism. To fulfil such an ambition, I will resort predominantly to close textual analysis, while having recourse to

a range of theoretical tools, such as Lacanian and Kristevan psychoanalysis, Barthesian criticism, feminist theory, Foucauldian sociology or Lyotardian philosophy. Such a combined approach, as well as my inquiry's interdisciplinary character, suggest its place within the area of cultural studies, a classification further justified by my aim to reposition Makine's novelistic practice in a wider historical and political context. Indeed, this book will relate the author's writings to Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet political domination and expansionism, while examining its potential impact on its readers' conception of the historical events it describes. Finally, equally characteristically for cultural studies, my investigation of Makine's aesthetics and politics will be guided by a dedication to an ethical evaluation of the author's novelistic project, of its political message and of its possible ramifications for its readers' knowledge of Russia's role in World War II.

The present study's both central focus and methodology mean that it fills a lacuna in the existing Makine scholarship which, however extensive and diverse, has barely touched upon the questions I explore. Among the issues that have already been addressed at length by critics is the autobiographical character of Makine's work or the correlated question of its protagonists' complex and unstable identity.¹⁰³ Many studies have also been devoted to the bilingualism and biculturalism of Makinean heroes and Makine himself, or to the intertextuality of the author's work.¹⁰⁴ Equally, there exists a good number of comparative analyses setting Makine's prose against other writers' work.¹⁰⁵ Conversely, the role of history has been dealt with only briefly by Gheorghe Derbac,¹⁰⁶ Alexia Gassin,¹⁰⁷ Thierry Laurent¹⁰⁸ and Julie Hansen, who has also

103 These issues have been explored by the following works: Thierry Laurent, *Andreï Makine: Russe en exil* (Paris: Connaissances et Savoirs, 2006); Nazarova; *Andreï Makine*, ed. by Murielle Lucie Clément (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009); and Agata Sylwestrzak-Wszelaki, *Andreï Makine: L'Identité problématique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010).

104 Murielle Lucie Clément, *Andreï Makine: L'Ekphrasis dans son oeuvre* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011) and *Andreï Makine: Le Multilinguisme, la photographie, le cinéma et la musique dans son oeuvre* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010).

105 Comparisons have been sought between Makine's work and that of Patrick Chamoiseau, Marcel Proust, François Cheng, Anton Chekhov, Ivan Bunin, Nathalie Sarraute or Milan Kundera.

106 Gheorghe Derbac, "Présent passé. Passé présent": Écriture et ethos de l'histoire dans *Requiem pour l'Est* et *La Vie d'un homme inconnu* d'Andreï Makine', *Études romanes de Brno*, 31.1 (2012), 281–94.

107 Alexia Gassin, 'Andreï Makine, témoin intemporel de la guerre en Russie soviétique', *Carnets: revue électronique d'études françaises*, 5 (2015), 195–206.

108 Laurent, 'La Seconde Guerre mondiale dans l'oeuvre d'Andreï Makine'.

observed the potential correspondence between the author's work and postmodern poetics,¹⁰⁹ as have done, however fleetingly, Mary Theis,¹¹⁰ Stéphanie Bellemare-Page¹¹¹ and Adrian Wanner.¹¹² Moreover, not only have the Franco-Russian novelist's intense interest in history or indeed his representation of World War II not been given full academic attention, but also none of the afore-listed authors have investigated the relationship between the postmodern character and historicism of Makine's writing, which is precisely the aim of the present book. But, as my inquiry is carving out a new territory in Makine studies, it sets itself in opposition to the existing critical works concerning the Franco-Russian author's output, which are — it must be stated — predominantly hagiographic or at least neutral in tone. This study, in contrast, adopts a critical perspective on the author's figurations of Russian history and hopes to expose the political bias of Makine's fiction and, more precisely, its promotion of conservative, not to say reactionary values. What interests me most, however, is the potential misalignment between Makine's aesthetics and political message, which becomes particularly flagrant when viewed in the light of the Hutcheonian attachment of historiographic metafiction (and of postmodernism in general) to historical revisionism and political dissent.

The final part of these introductory remarks concerns the scope and the structure of this book whose main body is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 takes stock of the narrative strategies used by Makine and reflected in the practice of historiographic metafiction, and Chapters 2 through 5 deal with the author's representation of different categories of the Great Fatherland War victims. Given the central focus of this book, Chapter 1 begins with a discussion of the construction of Makinean characters who, victimised by the Soviet state and marginalised by Soviet historiography, fit in with the paradigm of a postmodern hero established by historiographic metafiction. Additionally, endowed with hybrid and fluctuating identities, the women and men featured

109 Julie Hansen, "La simultanéité du présent": Memory, History, and Narrative in Andreï Makine's Novels *Le Testament français* and *Requiem pour l'Est*, *MLN*, 128.4 (September 2013), 881–99; and 'Stalingrad Statues and Stories: War Remembrance in Andreï Makine's *The Earth and the Sky of Jacques Dorme*', *Canadian Slavonic Papers: Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, 54.3–4 (2012), 341–56.

110 Mary Theis, 'Makine's Postmodern Writing about Exile, Memory, and Connection', *Comparative Literature and Culture*, 14.5 (2012), <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2149&context=clweb>>.

111 Stéphanie Bellemare-Page, 'L'Écriture mise en oeuvre: Métatextualité chez Andreï Makine', in *Andreï Makine*, ed. by Clément (2009), pp. 103–14.

112 Wanner, 'Andreï Makine: "Seeing Russia in French"', p. 29.

by Makine's novels reflect the postmodern doubt regarding the individual, as enshrined by the Enlightenment and Romanticism, and still part of the modernist canon. Chapter 1 then explores two defining, in Hutcheon's view, characteristics of historiographic metafiction, which are the postmodern novel's interest in the past and self-reflexivity. Here I recontextualise Makine's prose with the debate surrounding postmodernism's historicism that some connect to (reactionary) nostalgia, while others consider as a sign of postmodernism's engagement in a critical and ironic recall of the past. As for the metafictional self-awareness of Makine's writings, I show that it serves to foreground issues such as the narrativity of history, the textuality of our knowledge about the past, the tension between the novelist's creative licence and commitment to historical accuracy, the subjectivity and political bias of historical accounts, and the role of historical reference in the process of retrieving and narrating the past. While touching upon all these questions, I will concentrate specifically on the perceived conflict between truth and artistic invention, which, having haunted historical literature since its beginnings, has now been, in Hutcheon's view, resolved by historiographic metafiction. In fact, Makine's novels overtly put verisimilitude on a par with veracity; thus, as I will argue, somewhat dangerously hailing the power of myths in creating historical consciousness. The postmodern softening of the distinction between fact and fiction proceeds, among others, from history and literature both being textual constructs and depending on textual sources. This is another issue to which I give attention in Chapter 1 where I also explore the interconnected problem of the unreliability of textual sources, exposed by the historiographic metafiction analysed by Hutcheon and Makine's novels alike. The chapter's final sections will focus on the 'presentism' of history or anachronism, which means that representations of the past are inevitably determined by the contemporary perspective and, in correlation, tainted by politics, of which Makine's oeuvre is acutely aware and of which, I will contend, it is a prime example.

The issues raised in Chapter 1 will echo throughout the subsequent four chapters that investigate Makine's portrayal of different categories of World War II survivors. Beginning with the figure of the Hero of the Soviet Union, in Chapter 2 I examine the various narrative strategies used by *La Fille d'un Héros de l'Union soviétique* in order to transform this epitome of the state-fabricated myth of the Great Victory into one of the war's most tragic victims. While doing so I consider Makine's position on the cult of the war, whose vicissitudes are traced by his debut novel and whose fallaciousness the author exposes by opposing it to the soldier's private frontline memories. I will argue, however, that the Hero's victimhood ultimately serves to rehabilitate the myth of the

Great Victory as a narrative capable of consolidating the nation by providing the war and postwar generations with a sense of pride and moral superiority over the West.

In contrast to Chapter 2, Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are concerned with the other end of the spectrum of Soviet wartime experience; namely, they are devoted to Makine's depiction of those whose contribution to the war effort and wartime ordeal were deliberately neglected by Soviet historiography. In Chapter 3, I frame my discussion of Makine's representation of war amputees with Michel Foucault's, Judith Butler's and Elaine Scarry's writings on the power regimes' and history's destructive influence upon the body. Here I argue, however, that the omnipresence of maimed bodies in the author's work only partially serves to indict the Soviet government's callous attitude towards human life and health. Rather, in Makine's writing the amputee, whose fragmentation and outsiderdom render her/him a postmodern figure par excellence, becomes, paradoxically, an emblem of wholeness by being a memento of the Soviet people's alleged unity of purpose and patriotic consensus in their shared struggle against fascism. Hence, corroborating Oushatkine's view that communities of loss are 'a significant form of belonging',¹¹³ the Franco-Russian novelist turns the war invalid into an antidote to the disintegration of the social fabric and the feeling of disconnectedness experienced by the Russians since the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹¹⁴

Continuing to focus on the humble and the particular rather than the heroic and the grandiose, in Chapter 4 I address the representation of Jewish bravery and victimhood in Makine's prose. While illuminating these issues with the Soviet state's discriminatory policy on the memory of both the Holocaust and Jewish fighters, I consider them in the broader context of French post-war thought, where the Jew symbolises a positively valorised otherness and Auschwitz is shorthand for postmodern memory. Yet, despite the Soviet Jew's being a paradigmatic postmodern figure, Makine, I will argue, ends up largely following the Soviet demagogues in their policy of concealment. This he achieves by, firstly, shifting the focus from Jewish to Soviet tragedy and, secondly, insisting on the Jew's acculturation. And, as if this renunciation of religious, cultural and linguistic identity was not enough, Makine's novels, as I demonstrate by exploring the ramifications of the author's intertextual use of the Saint Christopher legend, relegate the Jew to a subservient position in relation to the Russian, thus re-presenting Jewishness as inferior to Russian/Soviet identity.

113 Oushatkine, p. 14.

114 Cf. Ignatieff, p. 162, and Oushatkine, pp. 20–1.

The final category of victims considered in this book that, for lack of space must regrettably neglect other disadvantaged figures staged by Makine's writing, is the survivor of the blockade of Leningrad whose ordeal was, shockingly, a taboo subject in Stalin's Russia. Once the ban on the siege memory was lifted, the propaganda turned starving civilians into 'heroic defenders', and Leningrad itself into the 'city front'. The novels analysed in Chapter 5 appear to oppose this misrepresentation, yet a close reading of *La Vie d'un homme inconnu* reveals that Makine gradually diminishes the distance between starving civilians and valiant soldiers, and between the quasi-deserted city and the surrounding battlefields. This is mainly achieved through the musical intertexts which additionally help resurrect another myth, namely that of the Leningraders' high level of culture during the siege. Consequently, Chapter 5 will show that as Makine's reputation grows and the war recedes in memory, the author's depiction of the blockade and of the Great Fatherland War as a whole becomes more idealistic and thus more in tune with the official Soviet-time version of the war.

Andreï Makine's Novels as Historiographic Metafictions

Introduction: From Architecture to Metafiction

Although Linda Hutcheon's interests lie chiefly with literature, her discussion of historiographic metafiction begins with an analysis of Paolo Portoghesi's series of facades *La Strada Novissima*, presented at the 1980 Venice Biennale and considered as heralding the advent of a new aesthetics. Similarly, Fredric Jameson traces his own conception of postmodern culture back to reflections upon the Los Angeles Westin Bonaventure Hotel,¹ which, in contrast to the elitist and utopian modernist buildings, inscribes itself into the 'tawdry and commercial sign system of the surrounding city' seeking to speak its very language.² And if in the English-speaking world the use of the term 'post-modern' has been expanded from architecture to other arts, in France it continues to be associated primarily with an architectural style.³

In this context, an apparently inconsequential episode of Andreï Makine's recent novel, *Une femme aimée*, opens itself up to an interpretation as a metatextual comment upon the author's novelistic practice and can be understood as his indirect allegiance to the principles of postmodernism. The episode in question concerns Sergei Erdmann, the central character's father, who, rendered insane by political terror and personal loss, spends his remaining years constructing and dismantling an enormous architectural model. Composed of mutually incongruous styles, Erdmann's edifice is stamped with typically postmodern heterogeneity and eclecticism, while the fact that it is made up entirely of quotations calls to mind Hutcheon's identification of parody and pastiche as forms of postmodern interdiscursivity.⁴ If Erdmann thus creates a space for a dialogue between the past and the present, he is hardly concerned with the past as it was, but rather as it *could have been*, the elements constituting his model having being borrowed from projects that, considered overambitious, were never executed. The model thus invokes the idea behind

1 Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 2.

2 *Ibidem*, p. 39.

3 Compagnon, *Les Cinq Paradoxes de la modernité*, p. 147.

4 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, pp. 124–40.

uchronian fiction, a strand within postmodern literature, which, inspired by the notion that any situation implies a plethora of divergent possibilities that far exceed those that happened to have been realised, offers alternative accounts of the past.⁵ Finally, characterised by indeterminacy and lack of logic (e.g. a staircase leads to nowhere), Erdmann's project implicitly criticises the historians' endeavour to represent the past as an unbroken chain of causes and effects that interlink historical facts.⁶ While Hayden White notes that '[t]he veracity of the representation hinges on the question of the likelihood of this type of cause-and-effect sequence occurring at specific times and places and under specific conditions',⁷ Foucault, whose conception of genealogy places him within the scope of postmodern philosophy of history, advocates the idea of historiography that 'record[s] the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality'.⁸ To put it differently, Sergei Erdmann's work voices the postmodern eschewal of absolutes, continuum and closure, instead favouring uncertainty, discontinuity, open-endedness and plurality. Consequently, despite the efforts of Makine's novelistic alter-egos to cut themselves off from the innovations of today's fiction,⁹ and to present their work as canonical and themselves as heirs of great Russian writers such as Tolstoy, Chekhov or Dostoyevsky,¹⁰ both the tropes of and the narrative devices found in the author's writing testify to the influence of contemporary and especially postmodern poetics on Makine's prose. It is this simultaneously thematic and structural affinity between Makine's novels, exemplified by *Une femme aimée* and its self-conscious meditation upon the daunting task of telling history through a work

5 Wesseling, p. 100.

6 Cf. Siegfried Krakauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 275.

7 Hayden White, 'Historiography and Historiophoty', *American Historical Review*, 93.5 (December 1988), 1193–99 (p. 1198).

8 Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Généalogie, Histoire', in *Michel Foucault: Philosophie. Anthologie*, ed. by Arnold I. Davidson and Frédéric Gros (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), pp. 393–423 (p. 393). The translation comes from 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', trans. by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. by Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 139–64.

9 That this is also Makine's own view transpires from the author's pronouncements. In one interview he described contemporary French literature as 'awash with sperm and faecal matter'. Quoted by Ian McCall, 'Andrei Makine's France: A Translingual Writer's Portrayal of His "terre d'accueil"', *French Cultural Studies*, 16.3 (October 2005), 305–20 (p. 318).

10 Makine's writing is indeed strongly rooted in Russian literary tradition. For a study of the parallels between the author's and some Russian writers' prose, see Gillespie, 'Bartavels, Ortolans, and Borshch'.

of fiction, and postmodern historical literature that will be the focus of the present chapter, which offers a discussion of those aspects of the author's work that encourage its categorisation as historiographic metafiction.

The Orphans of History: The Good German, the Kind Ivan and the Virtuous 'Mobile Field Wife'

Because the present book is concerned with the Franco-Russian author's representation of the Great Fatherland War through the microhistories of its heroes and victims, it is logical to begin my discussion with the construction of Makinean protagonists. In this section I will demonstrate that Makinean heroines and heroes largely fit in with the paradigm of 'ex-centricity', as Hutcheon designates the liminality of the protagonists populating historiographic metafiction.¹¹ Furthermore, also typically for postmodern literature, the author foregrounds the fictionality of his characters, and, by extension, of his novels themselves. Finally, I will show that despite his apparent ambition to adopt a de-centred perspective towards the war by concentrating on its unsung heroes and victims, Makine maintains the state-sponsored representation of the war as a predominantly masculine experience, while following the official portrayal of the Red Army soldier as a paragon of virtue and promulgating the pan-Soviet, not to say Russocentric view of the war.

The aspect of Makinean characters that has been most commented upon is their complex and problematic identity, which proceeds from their mixed or uncertain origins, and which is symptomatized by their bilingualism, biculturalism and a sense of non-belonging.¹² '[L]oeuvre d'Andreï Makine', writes Agata Sylwestrzak-Wszelaki, 'se situe au contact de deux langues et deux cultures différentes qui s'unissent dans une seule identité hybride.' '[Andreï Makine's oeuvre situates itself at the intersection of two different languages and cultures that come together as one hybrid identity.]'¹³ This hybrid identity could be exemplified by Alyosha of *Le Testament français* (henceforth *Le Testament*), his nameless avatar of *La Terre et le ciel de Jacques Dorme* (henceforth *Jacques*

11 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 62.

12 See, for example, Sylwestrzak-Wszelaki. See also Stéphanie Bellemare-Page, 'Rencontres de l'altérité dans l'oeuvre d'Andreï Makine', in *Le Monde selon Andreï Makine*, ed. by Clément and Caratozzolo, pp. 145–60; and F. César Guttiérrez V., 'Andreï Makine, l'homme à la recherche de son identité', in *Le Monde selon Andreï Makine*, ed. by Clément and Caratozzolo, pp. 181–200.

13 Sylwestrzak-Wszelaki, p. 31. My own translation.

Dorme) or Oleg Erdmann of *Une femme aimée*. Exposed to French language and culture in childhood, the first two protagonists become intellectually, if not emotionally, disconnected from their native Russia, and then, having immigrated to France, feel equally alienated from their hosts. As in these two cases, the sense of non-belonging experienced by Makinean protagonists is often heightened by their condition as orphans. Encouraged by Makine himself, who endows his characters with elements of his own life and frequently uses autodiegetic narration, critics tend to consider his protagonists' duality, alienation, orphanhood, nomadism and homelessness in strictly autobiographical terms.¹⁴ Alternatively, one could approach the Makinean hero's predicament in the context of the Russian tradition of the disregard for private life, homeliness and individualism,¹⁵ which manifested itself in the work of Pyotr Chaadaev or the Slavophile philosophers. Attached to the status of an outcast, the nineteenth-century mad Russian émigré posed himself and his nation as orphan, as nomad or as hermit;¹⁶ he thus, in Svetlana Boym's words, was championing the idea of 'transcendental homelessness' as a consequence not so much of a loss of home or roots, as of the Russian character that has but scorn for middle-class domesticity.¹⁷ 'We Russians', wrote Chaadaev, 'like illegitimate children, come to this world without a patrimony, without any links with people who lived on the earth before us'.¹⁸

Yet, even if the notion of the absence of origins and cultural legitimacy advocated by Chaadaev is likely to have shaped the outlook of Makine's resolutely anti-bourgeois and anti-materialist protagonists, their exilic condition and lack of a stable and unified self may equally be conceived of as signs of the postmodern character of the author's work. This is because postmodernism undermines the logocentric concept of the self, challenging, as Hutcheon notes, any aesthetic that assumes a secure and confident knowledge of the subject.¹⁹ As opposed to the traditional novel that represents a coherent and motivated inscription of a unified identity,²⁰ historiographic metafiction subverts the

14 Cf. Nazarova.

15 Boym, *Common Places*, pp. 73–88.

16 Dale E. Peterson, 'Civilising the Race: Chaadaev and the Paradox of Eurocentric Nationalism', *The Russian Review*, 56.4 (October 1997), 550–63 (p. 552).

17 Boym, *Common Places*, p. 77.

18 P. Ia. Chaadaev, *The Major Works of Peter Chaadaev*, trans. by Raymond T. McNally (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), p. 37. Quoted by Daniel Rancour-Laferrrière, *Slave Soul of Russia: Moral Masochism and the Cult of Suffering* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), p. 30.

19 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, pp. 158–59.

20 *Ibidem*, p. 160.

construct of the 'universal and timeless humanist subject' that happens to be a white, middle-class and individual Western man.²¹ Indeed, while Jameson considers the fragmentation and death of the subject a 'fashionable theme' of contemporary theory, marking the 'end of the bourgeois monad or ego or individual',²² Gerald Graff invokes the refusal of 'the subject-oriented paradigm of rational epistemology'²³ and Terry Eagleton speaks of the 'fragmentary and schizoid self' inherited by postmodernism from modernism.²⁴

Thus reconsidered, the fluctuation of the identity of Makinean protagonists who often wear — literally or figuratively — disguises, metafictionally exposes, to paraphrase Hutcheon, the fiction of selfhood that underlies the creation of fictional characters and, consequently, the artificiality of the novel itself.²⁵ The motif of false identity that seems to obsess Makine has been thematised by *Le Testament*, *Le Crime d'Olga Arbélina* (henceforth *Olga Arbélina*), *Requiem pour l'Est* (henceforth *Requiem*), *La Musique d'une vie* (henceforth *La Musique*) or *Une femme aimée*. In *Le Testament*, which, ironically, taken by the critics for the author's confession, turned Makine overnight from an obscure Russian immigrant into a celebrity, the theme of usurpation of identity is announced as of the novel's opening that describes the Russian women's habit of pronouncing before the camera the mysteriously sounding French words 'petite pomme' ['little apple'] (*TF*, 15).²⁶ By doing so these women hope to both appear more graceful in the photo and convince themselves that their lives will be made up of precisely such moments of beauty. This practice which, besides, seems to have no reflection in French customs and may have been inspired by the strong presence of the motif of *iablochko* (little apple) in Russian popular culture,²⁷ provides the photographed women with a patina of Frenchness. The latter, however, only shields from view a life of misery, which, as the narrator stipulates, is the average Russian woman's lot. Of little significance in itself, this

21 *Ibidem*, p. 159.

22 Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *New Left Review*, 146 (1984), 53–92. Quoted by Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 158.

23 Gerald Graff, 'Babbitt at the Abyss: The Social Context of Postmodern American Fiction', *TriQuarterly*, 33 (1975), 305–37 (p. 321). Quoted by Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 158.

24 Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', p. 397.

25 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 158.

26 This and all the following translations of quotations from *Le Testament français* come from *Le Testament français*, trans. by Geoffrey Strachan (London: Sceptre, 1997).

27 Toby Garfitt, 'La Musique d'une vie: Le cas de la petite pomme', in *Andrei Makine: Perspectives russes*, ed. by Margaret Parry, Marie Louise Scheidhauer and Edward Welch (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), pp. 17–26.

opening episode anticipates the story of the novel's central character who believes himself to be part-French but who, as he learns from his grandmother's posthumous confession, is not only of pure Russian lineage but also an illegitimate child and, most likely, one born out of rape. The motif of false identity then extends to the novels which the protagonist will create once in France and which, though written in French, he will have no choice but to publish as translations from Russian.

Unlike Alyosha, who unknowingly assumes a French identity, his avatars such as Outkin of *Au temps du fleuve Amour* (henceforth *Fleuve Amour*) or the protagonist of *Jacques Dorme* re-write their past in order to endow themselves with more glorious or simply more conventional origins. Outkin, for example, pretends to be a son of a fighter pilot who, like the real-life Hero of the Soviet Union, Captain Nikolai Gastello, flew his burning aircraft into a column of German tanks. By referring to a story which, like many of the tales of Soviet heroines and heroes that were but wartime propaganda, may not be true, Makine doubly undermines his protagonist's efforts before they are ultimately discredited by simple arithmetic: born (like Makine himself!) twelve years after the end of the war, Outkin cannot possibly be a son of a pilot killed in the war. To compensate for the deflated myth, both Outkin and *Jacques Dorme's* protagonist seek alternative surrogate fathers; while *Fleuve Amour's* three central characters identify with the cunning secret agents, charismatic seducers or recluse writers incarnated by the French actor Jean-Paul Belmondo, *Jacques Dorme's* protagonist finds a father figure in a French fighter pilot whose story he will then relate in a novel. He thus not only revives the myth of a heroic father he nurtured in childhood before it was brutally destroyed, but also legitimates his choice to live in France and use French as his language of creative expression.

The injurious sentence — 'Mais tout le monde le sait, ton père, les mitrailleurs l'ont abattu comme un chien ...' ['Look, we all know about your father. The firing squad shot him like a dog ...'] —, which shatters the heroic father myth for *Jacques Dorme's* central character, is also one obsessing the unnamed protagonist of *Requiem* (TCJD, 50).²⁸ Out of all of Makinean heroes this military surgeon-cum-spy is perhaps the closest to the archetypal postmodern protagonist, for he is a nomad with a problematic background and an identity in constant flux. Also an orphan, *Requiem's* protagonist becomes an easy target for the KGB who lure him with a fictitious and more acceptable identity.

28 This and the following translations of quotations from *La Terre et le ciel de Jacques Dorme* come from *The Earth and Sky of Jacques Dorme*, trans. by Geoffrey Strachan (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2011).

Indeed, the latter's appeal lies in its power to free the protagonist from his origins in the Caucasus, where his parents — a Balkar woman deported in 1944 from her mountainous homeland and a World War II veteran unable to reconcile his frontline memories with the state-manufactured myth of the war — lived in internal exile until tracked down by Stalin's henchmen. The sense of relief accompanying the hero's symbolic rebirth, staged, fittingly, on a boat hazardingly tossed by the waves, which inevitably brings to mind the aquatic environment of the womb, is shared by Alexei Berg of *La Musique*, who, by stealing a dead Russian soldier's papers and uniform, dissociates himself from his Jewish and now disgraced parents. Returning to *Requiem*, even if its protagonist's profession requires him to reinvent himself and travel constantly, his heart and mind are invisibly, albeit firmly, connected to a centre constituted by the Soviet Union's formidable power apparatus. This situation changes with the collapse of communism, which makes the centre vanish and brings about the demise of the protagonist's surrogate parents — his guiding officer and his fellow agent —, who remained loyal servants of what was left of the once mighty and fearsome empire. To consolidate his self after it was fractured by this disaster of apocalyptic dimensions, the ex-spy narrates the USSR's belligerent history through the transgenerational story of his grandparents, his parents and himself, thus using language to create a semblance of presence, unity and continuity.

Liminal or, to use Hutcheon's term, 'ex-centric' figures themselves, Makinean narrators counter their post-apocalyptic despondency and their exilic condition, which, as in the case of Alyosha of *Le Testament* or *Requiem*'s protagonist-narrator, leads them to the brink of suicide, by relating stories of those sidelined by normative Soviet society. Social marginality is also a concern of historiographic metafiction that trace lives of 'peripheral figures',²⁹ as Hutcheon calls those whose gender, ethnicity, class, race or sexual orientation have placed them on the outskirts of the homogenous monolith of dominant culture.³⁰ The tendency of postmodern literature to give voice and authority to, in Ann Heilmann's and Mark Llewellyn's formulation, 'the silenced Other'³¹ is reflective of the strand in today's historiography called 'popular-memory history', which, as Jonathan Brunstedt explains, seeks to explore the process of memory formation from the bottom up and, in doing so, to 'recover the individual voices long neglected by an overemphasis on a small minority of

29 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 114.

30 *Ibidem*, p. 179.

31 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, *Metafiction and Metahistory in Contemporary Women's Writing* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 142.

political elites.³² Similarly, Wesseling points out that, unlike traditional historiography and its 'supplement', the classical historical novel, which, by virtue of being based on documents, told the stories of 'princes, statesmen, generals and other powerful public figures', today's historiography and its fictional equivalent, the postmodern historical novel, are more about the 'losers of history'.³³ The latter are the 'subordinated or defeated peoples and social classes' who have no access to official culture and thus have little opportunity for making a record.³⁴ Wesseling's observation is shared by Jerome de Groot who, when retracing the historical novel's development, recognises the contemporary tendency to re-write the past from the point of view of those who have been consciously consigned to a marginal position — slaves, working class people, gays and lesbians — and who articulate 'an alternative, disquieting and destabilising past'.³⁵ However, in the spirit of Derridean deconstruction where binary oppositions undergirding the Western way of thinking are neutralised and rendered undecidable without privileging whichever of the pair's components, historiographic metafiction does not reverse the formerly discriminatory valorisation or turn the margin into a new centre.³⁶ Rather, as Hutcheon has it, it questions the legitimacy of the centre as a norm while the ex-centrics' dissonant voices create a 'decentralised community'.³⁷ This is consistent, adds Hutcheon, with the nature of postmodernism that interrogates — yet without destroying — centralised, totalised and closed systems, as well as sameness (or single otherness) and homogeneity, making room for a consideration of the different, the hybrid, the heterogeneous and the provisional.³⁸

Focusing on figures liminal in relation to the official Soviet discourse on the war, Makine's novels largely corroborate the afore-cited comments on the construction of the postmodern protagonist and the de-centred point of view assumed by historiographic metafiction. Moreover, like Makinean narrators, the women and men whose stories these novels relate are often in possession of a hybrid or unstable identity, a fact succinctly captured by the opening scene of *La Musique*. Offering a bird's-eye view of passengers waiting in a snow-bound railway station for a massively delayed train, the narrator's gaze zooms in on

32 Jonathan Brunstedt, 'Building a Pan-Soviet Past: The Soviet War Cult and the Turn Away from Ethnic Particularism', *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 38 (2011), 149–71 (p. 151).

33 Wesseling, p. 111.

34 *Ibidem*, p. 110.

35 Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 148.

36 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 65.

37 *Ibidem*, p. 12 and p. 230.

38 *Ibidem*, pp. 41–2.

two dyads marked by the dialectic of activity and passivity, or perhaps, more appropriately, of hope and resignation. This juxtaposition of, on the one hand, a virile soldier and a downtrodden war veteran, and, on the other, a restless prostitute and a Madonna-like young mother, reflects the fact that in Makine's novelistic universe a venerated war hero is never far from becoming a pariah, just as an innocent girl is only a step away from a moral downfall.³⁹ In the four chapters to come we will see that similar undecidability marks scores of Makinean protagonists, as illustrated by the war amputee transmogrified into a symbol of wholeness and plenitude, when he becomes an emblem of the unity of the Soviet people fighting the Germans (Chapter 3). Likewise, the victimhood of Holocaust survivors is disturbingly complicated when they are implicated in the genocide directed against them (Chapter 4), while those trapped in blockaded Leningrad occupy a borderline position between helpless victims and fearless fighters (Chapter 5).

Finally, Makine's portrayal of the Germans deserves some attention, as it undermines the Soviet black-and-white conception of the war that invariably demonised the enemy. Apart from *La Fille d'un Héros de l'Union soviétique* (henceforth *La Fille*), where Wehrmacht soldiers are vilified as heartless killing machines, the Germans are routinely humanised and shown to have been, just like their Soviet coevals, thrown into the mayhem of war by higher and evil forces. This companionate portrayal of the enemy is exemplified by the father of the East-German actress featured in *Une femme aimée*, who is charged with bombing Leningrad but who, on noticing women and children on the ground, decides not to open the hatch of his bomber plane. Similarly, Wilfried Almendinner, the German veteran of the battle of Moscow staged by *La Fille*, reminisces about a frosty night he spent in the trenches and the sympathy he felt for the Russians who, unlike his lot, did not even have a stove. The two armies' transnational communion is hinted at with the motif of the sky that, indifferent to transient animosities, in Makine's oeuvre is endowed with the capacity to unite men in their sheer humanity. The irrelevance of man-made categories, such as national identity, is then further spelt out when Almendinner recalls his childhood collection of toy lighthouses, each holding a sample of sand collected at a different European beach. One day the young Almendinner spilled the content of the lighthouses and mixed all the sands together, thus symbolically doing away with national differences. Even more

39 For a discussion of the duality of Makine's representation of women, see Helena Duffy, 'Les Putes et les soumises: La dualité de l'image de la femme dans l'oeuvre d'André Makine', *Romanica Wratislaviensia*, 58 (2014), 43–58.

humane than Eva's father or Almendinner is Kurt of *La Femme qui attendait* (henceforth *La Femme*), the sad-faced cook fondly remembered by the old women of the village of Mirnoe as a man who, during the war, brought food to their children. Reciprocally, the Russians themselves prove capable of compassion for the enemy, as evidenced by Pyotr Evdokimov and Yakov Zinger of *Confession d'un porte-drapeau déchu* (henceforth *Confession*), or by Volsky and Mila of *La Vie d'un homme inconnu* (henceforth *L'Homme inconnu*). If Pyotr feels sorry for the Germans he kills at the front and Volsky makes no distinction between the Russian and German wounded and then, during the battle of Kursk, spares a young German tanker, Yakov protects enemy remains from vengeance-hungry children. Likewise, the central protagonists of *L'Homme inconnu* search a former battlefield for body parts and artefacts belonging to fallen soldiers — Soviet or German — in order to give them a proper burial. It must be noted, however, that Makine's challenge of the Manichean conception of the war propagated by the Soviet regime is likely to be politically motivated, its real objective being to strengthen the image of the Russians as paragons of Christian forgiveness and as an ostensibly peace-living nation.

Whatever the writer's motivation, Makine's humanisation of the Germans or his figurations of Jewish bravery and the Leningraders' transgressive behaviour during the siege defy the official Soviet view of the war. In contrast, his portrayal of the Red Army soldiers themselves or of women's military engagement fully coincide, as I will now argue, with Soviet commemorations of the conflict, which championed the idea of 'non-ethnic, pan-Soviet uniformity',⁴⁰ or even of 'Russian exceptionalism',⁴¹ as well as 'the "unwomanly" mask of the savage fighting on the Eastern Front'.⁴² The first part of my claim is substantiated by the virtual absence from Makine's oeuvre of smaller ethnic groups that contributed to defeating Hitler, the only exceptions being the Siberian sub-machine gunner of *La Fille*; two Jewish soldiers, one of whom fights under a Russian identity; and a Volga German. In all other cases Makine abstains from identifying his protagonists' nationality, which means that they are either all

40 Brunstedt, p. 150.

41 *Ibidem*, pp. 150–51.

42 Roger D. Markwick, '“A Sacred Duty”: Red Army Women Veterans Remembering the Great Fatherland War, 1941–1945', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 54.3 (2008), 403–20 (p. 403). For a discussion of the forgetting of women soldiers, see also Adrienne M. Harris, 'The Myth of the Woman Warrior and World War II in Soviet Culture' (unpublished masters thesis, University of Kansas, 2008), pp. 214–16 and pp. 273–78; Svetlana Alexevich, *War's Unwomanly Face*, trans. by Keith Hammond and Lyudmila Lezhneva (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988); and Roger D. Markwick and Euridice Charon Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Russian or that he eschews ethnic particularism, an argument supported by his depiction of Jews as perfectly integrated Soviet citizens with no religion, language and cultural tradition of their own.

A similar criticism could be levelled at the author's representations of women involved in Russia's struggle against Hitler, Makinean heroines being methodically reduced to the role of frontline nurses, as illustrated by Tatyana (*La Fille*), Charlotte (*Le Testament*), Alexandra (*Jacques Dorme*), Li (*Olga Arbélina*) or Berg's nameless lover (*La Musique*). Alternatively, women await their loved ones at the rear, their commendable loyalty often extending far beyond the hostilities' end. Makine's female protagonists are further confirmed in their traditional domestic function of looking after men and children by their instrumental role in the soldier's wartime transformation that is repeatedly styled on the mirror stage, as theorised by Jacques Lacan. Like a mother who ushers her offspring into the realm of psychological — if not yet physical — autonomy, the maternal nurse helps the wounded soldier grasp his newly acquired emotional maturity and his corollary identity of a fully-fledged Soviet man. The only exception to this overwhelmingly reductive representation of women is a minor female character in *La Musique*, who, despite suffering from tuberculosis, does backbreaking work on the construction of a bridge required for supplying the front. However, the woman's contribution to the war effort remains indirect, which means that her case is more likely to illustrate the Soviet rhetoric of the whole nation's total wartime sacrifice. Such a reading is supported by the bloodstains covering the snow of the building site and potentially alluding to Christ's passion, which, as we will see in the chapters to come, is a running metaphor of the Soviets' martyrdom in World War II.

Consequently, although Berg first sneers at the propagandist slogan crowning the building site — 'Tout pour le front! Tout pour la victoire' ['Everything for the front! Everything for victory!'] — he will later pay homage to the women who lost their health or even life while working there (*MV*, 85). Otherwise, Makine is quite uninhibited in his patriarchal vision of Russia's armed struggle, as he entirely glosses over women combatants, just as did the state-controlled collective memory. Although around one million Soviet women fought in various capacities and there were twenty-eight thousand female partisans, not to mention the Red Army's uniqueness in establishing the world's first women's sniper school,⁴³ the dominant wartime and postwar discourse glorified and entrenched masculine military virtues,⁴⁴ as illustrated by the exclusion

43 Markwick, "A Sacred Duty", p. 409; and Markwick and Cardona, p. 1.

44 Markwick, "A Sacred Duty", p. 404, n. 6.

of female veterans from World War II remembrances.⁴⁵ The exception was the isolated cases of women-martyrs, such as the pilots Polina Osipenko and Marina Raskova, killed in aeroplane crashes,⁴⁶ or Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, a partisan allegedly tortured and murdered by the Germans.⁴⁷ Given his interest in the postwar discrimination of World War II veterans, it is astonishing that Makine fails to speak up for the *frontovichki*, as the Russians call Soviet women fighting on the Eastern Front. These women, writes Mark Edele, 'were faced with specific problems that their male counterparts did not have to face', while those problems that they shared with male soldiers were 'augmented by gendered expectations regarding civilian job choices.'⁴⁸ The silences surrounding the *frontovichki* concern 'the official pressure to return to family and working life; the stigma of the *PPZe*; or the fate of women invalids, physically or psychologically crippled, or those not recognised as heroes.'⁴⁹ If Makine deals with some of these issues, as he does through Tatyana Demidova of *La Fille*, who suffers injuries to her breast and hand, or through war widows such as Dimitri's aunt in *Fleuve Amour*, he resolves their stories with happy endings; while Ivan keeps his promise to wed Tatyana, Dimitri's aunt ends up marrying a war amputee, Verbin. Otherwise, as we will see in the remaining part of this book, Makine's writing aligns itself with the predominantly masculine, heroic and patriotic paradigm of the Great Fatherland War forged by Soviet historians.

Equally consonant with the official Soviet version of the war is Makine's depiction of the Red Army soldier, invariably imagined as an exemplar of courage and virtue. This morally unambiguous portrayal of Soviet troops fails to reflect historical accounts of the Red Army's internal problems or conduct on its way to Berlin.⁵⁰ Well-documented issues such as the recruits' cowardice, panic, self-inflicted injuries or desertion are almost entirely glossed over

45 Stephen M. Norris, 'Memory for Sale: Victory Day 2010 and Russian Remembrance', *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 38 (2011), 201–29 (p. 217).

46 Markwick, '“A Sacred Duty”', p. 410. See also Harris, 'The Myth of the Woman Warrior and World War II in Soviet Culture'.

47 Adrienne M. Harris, 'The Lives and Deaths of a Soviet Saint in the Post-Soviet Period: The Case of Zoia Kosmodem'ianskaia', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 53, 2–4 (June–Sept.–Dec. 2011), 271–304.

48 Mark Edele, 'Soviet Veterans as an Entitlement Group, 1945–1955', *Slavic Review*, 65.1 (Spring, 2006), 111–37 (p. 117).

49 *Ibidem*, p. 418. *PPZe* stands for *Polevaya pokhodnaya zhena*, a vulgar term that roughly translates as 'mobile field wife', Markwick, '“A Sacred Duty”', p. 417.

50 See, for example, Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939–1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

by Makine,⁵¹ the only exception being a minor character in *Le Testament* who keeps aggravating his healing wound so that he may not be sent back to the front. Yet, instead of facing disciplinary action, as he would have been likely to do in real life, the soldier is treated kindly by wise medical staff who put a plaster cast over his wound. Other uncomfortable facts such as the collaboration with the enemy, anti-Semitism in the army ranks, or rape and looting committed by Soviet soldiers on Polish and German territories, are dealt with similarly obliquely, while one of the two scenes in Makine's writing showing sexual violence perpetrated by Soviet troops displaces the readers' attention and sympathy from the victim to her Russian saviour. Before returning to the subjects of rape and looting in Chapter 2, I will now exemplify Makine's treatment of these issues with an episode relating a gang rape interrupted by Pavel, the father of *Requiem's* protagonist-narrator. The description is preceded with the narrator's remark that Pavel had witnessed many such incidents, but his efforts to chase away the rapists had always proven misplaced, as the women were willing, usually exchanging sex for food. Although this case is different, the narrator focuses not so much on the assaulted woman as on Pavel's decency and consequent unfair transfer to a punishment battalion (*shtrafnyi battalion*), which in practice meant near certain death.⁵² While supposedly addressing the question of rape, with this episode Makine reframes the problem of sexual assaults committed by the Red Army so as to score a number of goals. Firstly, he trivialises rape by suggesting the violated women's consent and, secondly, highlights the strict sanctions reserved for the perpetrators of sexual violence by explaining that had the rapists been found out they would have been court-martialled. Finally, Makine incites readers' admiration for Pavel's righteousness. As for the rape victim herself, who is most likely Polish, the narrator emphatically announces that his father did not pity her; instead her ordeal prompted his contemplation of his own female relatives' sufferings, since his sister's, mother's and mother's friend's faces all bore a similarly beautiful and tortured expression. From the plight of Russian women Pavel moves on to the devastation brought upon Russia itself by both communism and fascism,

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 130 and p. 212.

⁵² Established in 1942 by Stalin, punishment battalions were reserved for political prisoners, gulag inmates, former POWs, deserters, soldiers who had fought with the Whites during the Civil War, army 'deserters', that is Red Army troops who had lost contact with their units or been caught in enemy encirclement, and other undesirables. During the Great Fatherland War, *shtrafniki* were sent on hazardous front-line duty or suicidal missions such as clearing minefields. See Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 71 and p. 203. See also Alex Statiev, 'Penal Units in the Red Army', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 62.5 (2010), 721–47.

as in his imagination the rape victim merges with the Virgin Mary from the icon in the ransacked church of his native village. Sexual violation thus becomes a trope for the destruction of the temple whose walls are covered in sacrilegious graffiti and whose dome has been removed. All in all, we are to feel compassion for Makine's countrymen and their homeland, which, consistently with Russian cultural tradition, is personified here by Christ's ever-suffering Mother, and, given that in Russia the Virgin Mary is often conflated with her son,⁵³ is characteristically posited as a Christ-like victim, saviour and martyr.⁵⁴ Makine's defiant position on the question of rape by Soviet troops is confirmed by his penultimate novel where he settles scores with Western representations of the calamities visited by the Red Army upon civilians, and especially on women. And so the career of Eva Sander, an East German actress, is cut short when, after the reunification, she refuses to play a German rape victim and thus indict the Red Army. Undoubtedly alluding to Max Färberböck's 2008 film *Eine Frau in Berlin* (*The Downfall of Berlin Anonyma*), Sander's tirade against those badmouthing the Soviet troops is aimed at anyone daring to paint anything but a laudatory portrait of the Red Army.

What emerges from this brief analysis of Makinean protagonists is the self-contradictory character of their construction; on the one hand, as illustrated by the author's representation of war amputees or Jewish combatants, Makine strives to bring out from the shadow those excluded from Soviet war records. On the other hand, however, he often portrays these characters in a way consistent with the official war narrative or else, as evidenced by his take on the issue of rape, uses their suffering to corroborate it. In the next four chapters I will continue to examine Makine's heroines and heroes in the context of the Soviet-time conception of the war and with the objective of foregrounding their paradoxical status in relation to the paradigm of 'ex-centricity', fragmentation and instability created by historiographic metafiction.

Historicity, Rewriting and Nostalgia

Together with postmodernism's political engagement — or, according to some, the absence thereof — its historicism is one of the most hotly debated issues surrounding this cultural movement. For Richard Martin, for example, the epicentre of postmodern fiction is constituted precisely by history, 'whether as

53 Rancour-Laferriere, p. 146.

54 Joanna Hubbs, *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 87–142.

public collective awareness of the past, or as private revisions of public experience, or even as the elevation of private experience to public consciousness.⁵⁵ Following Martin, Hutcheon conceives of the postmodern novel as 'resolutely historical'.⁵⁶ As with Christos Romanos, who considers interest in history as what distinguishes modernist from postmodern fiction,⁵⁷ Hutcheon sets postmodern literature against its modernist predecessor, which sought to enshrine transcendent meanings and values such as those that could be provided by myths, religion or psychology.⁵⁸ Similarly, Wesseling states that, contrary to modernist writers who dealt with the past 'by means of synoptic schemes which divert our attention from processes of historical change to the eternally recurrent',⁵⁹ their postmodern successors do not 'escape from the flux of history into the stasis of myth'.⁶⁰

In the present book I will repeatedly foreground Makine's predilection for earlier dramas in human history or for likening his characters to mythical figures, a strategy which may be intent on rendering his Russian novels more accessible to non-Russian readers, but which does not necessarily distance the author's writing from postmodern poetics. Indeed, Makine's restaging of well-known myths and legends may be symptomatic of parody that Hutcheon recognises as a form of postmodern interdiscursivity. More narrowly, Makine's take on the myth of Narcissus or on the legend of Saint Christopher may exemplify the technique of renarrativisation, defined by Christian Moraru as 're-writing as cultural critique'⁶¹ and identified as a way of questioning the presuppositions, values and myths attached to canonical texts, and, consequently, as a powerful political tool. In contemporary French literature this practice can be exemplified by Michel Tournier's subversive rereading of the story of Robinson Crusoe⁶² or by his novel *Le Roi des aulnes*, which offers a reinterpretation of the legends of Bluebeard, the King of Elms and Saint Christopher.⁶³ More recently, by transposing *The Oresteia* into the context of World War II,

55 Richard Martin, 'Clio Bemused: The Uses of History in Contemporary American Fiction', *SubStance*, 27 (1980), 13–24 (p. 24). Quoted by Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 94.

56 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 4.

57 Christos Romanos, *Poetics of a Fictional Historian* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985), p. 140.

58 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 20 and p. 88.

59 Wesseling, p. 81.

60 *Ibidem*, p. 89.

61 Christian Moraru, *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001).

62 Tournier rewrites the story in *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* (1967) and *Vendredi ou la vie sauvage* (1971).

63 Michel Tournier, *Le Roi des aulnes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970).

American-born writer, Jonathan Littell, has enlisted the Greek tragedy in his narrator's meditation upon the question of responsibility.⁶⁴

That, like Tournier or Littell, Makine cannot resist the postmodern urge to retell well-known stories will become evident in my discussion of how Narcissus or Saint Christopher provide a pattern for the Franco-Russian author's protagonists. In Chapter 2 I will argue that by styling the eponymous character of *La Fille* on the hunter from Greek mythology, Makine strengthens his message about the delusion of Ivan Demidov, who repeatedly fails to recognise himself in his mirror image as his self-representation is undermined and distorted by the Soviet war narrative. As for Makine's use of the Saint Christopher legend to structure his representation of Jews, this renarrativisation, as in the work of postmodern (re)writers, has a political edge. Yet, rather than critiquing the source texts — as Tournier does when, by re-writing the Robinson Crusoe myth, he radically questions the supremacy of European over indigenous cultural values —, Makine, I will posit, uses the legend to fuel a conservative political agenda. Namely, he represents Jewish fighters and Holocaust victims in a way reminiscent of Soviet and unquestionably anti-Semitic figurations of this minority.

Before delving into Makine's practice of re-writing in later chapters, I will now illustrate it with the author's rereading of the ancient Greek myth of Philomela in *Requiem*, where it underpins the story of Anna, the protagonist-narrator's grandmother. If feminists read the violation and silencing of Philomela, raped and mutilated by her brother-in-law, as a metaphor of the patriarchal oppression of women, they translate the heroine's subsequent efforts to articulate wordlessly her ordeal and disclose Tereus's identity into women's attempts to speak their oppression outside patriarchal structures and discourse.⁶⁵ In contrast, the ordeal of Anna, who, during the Civil War of 1918–1922, is sexually assaulted and whose tongue is then cut off before she is buried alive, hardly serves to indict the Reds, as the heroine's sufferings are posited as an inevitable, albeit tragic, consequence of the violence wrought by military conflicts. Nor, despite its potential to allude to the 'hypermasculine behaviour', including wife-beating and mother-cursing, that some consider inherent to Russian culture,⁶⁶ is Anna's ordeal meant to foreground women's disadvantaged position and voicelessness within Russian society.

64 Jonathan Littell, *Les Bienveillantes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006).

65 See, for example, Elissa Marder, 'Disarticulated Voices: Feminism and Philomela', *Hypatia*, 7.2 (Spring 1992), 148–66; or Martha J. Cutter, 'Philomela Speaks: Alice Walkers' Revisioning of Rape Archetypes in *The Colour Purple*', *MELUS*, 25.3–4 (Autumn–Winter 2000), 161–80.

66 Rancour-Laferrriere, p. 144.

On the contrary, unlike Philomela who, unable to speak, weaves a tapestry narrating her story, Anna scrupulously conceals her traumatic experience. Moreover, how her silence is represented seems to be the ultimate expression of the virtue of *sophrosyne* embodied by Makine's heroines. Indeed, like in the ancient times when in line with the dictum that '[a] decent woman should just keep silent',⁶⁷ silence was 'coextensive with female obedience to male direction',⁶⁸ Makine systematically praises taciturn, patient, self-effacing and enduring women, opposing them to their offensively outspoken, opinionated and emancipated counterparts.⁶⁹ As for Anna herself, as well as being silent, she is, like Makine's positive heroines, maternal and engages in traditionally female activities. However, in contrast to Philomela, who uses her handicraft to seek revenge, the Makinean women who darn, sew, cook and make tea embody the Russian concept of *priterpelost*, sometimes rendered in English as 'servile patience' or, in Boris Pasternak's formulation, as 'capitulation before infinite humiliations'.⁷⁰ In other words, combined with the silent and unflinching endurance of their admittedly difficult lot, the non-verbal expression of women such as Charlotte Lemonnier, Olga Arbyelina or the nameless lover of *Requiem*'s protagonist-narrator, only relegates them further to the confines of the female gender stereotype of subservient domesticity. Consequently, Makine's representation of women drains the Philomela myth of its feminist potential, instead investing it with the ideal of Christian forgiveness towards one's enemy and self-sacrifice. This is implied by the fact that Anna shares her first name with Christ's grandmother or that she dies as a consequence of trying to save a child from drowning. The latter circumstance could in itself be read as a reference to the Saint Christopher legend, which narrates the story of a giant carrying Christ in the guise of a child across a treacherous river. Hence, as evidenced by Anna's tale, Makine partakes in the postmodern (re)writers' interest in transforming earlier texts, but not in their revisionist drive in relation to the original narratives,⁷¹ which in the

67 Jan Best and Nanny de Vries, Editorial, *Thamyris: Mythmaking From Past to Present*, 1.1 (Autumn 1994), 1–8 (p. 5).

68 Anna Carson, 'The Gender of Sound', *Thamyris: Mythmaking From Past to Present*, 1.1 (Autumn 1994), 10–32 (p. 18).

69 An example of a Western woman is Yana of *L'Homme inconnu*, who disappoints her former boyfriend, Ivan Shutov, with her emancipated ways, professional success, financial independence and, primarily, talkativeness.

70 Rancour-Laferrrière, p. 61.

71 Moraru, p. xii.

Franco-Russian author's case become, paradoxically, instrumental in articulating a traditionalist position.

Returning to the controversial issue of postmodernism's historicity, Wesseling's or Hutcheon's view stands in opposition to that of Jameson, Eagleton or Hal Foster, for whom postmodern art is stamped by a loss of historicity and, in contrast to modernism, is about the synchronic rather than the diachronic; about space rather than time.⁷² And so Eagleton speaks of 'depthless styles, *dehistoricised*, decathected surfaces of postmodernist culture',⁷³ which he describes as desperate to efface history or at least to spacialise it, and as being trapped in an eternal present.⁷⁴ As for Foster, he acknowledges postmodernism's return to past forms and topics, yet regards this return as an escapist flight from the present and accuses postmodern art of kitschifying history or turning it into 'ahistory':⁷⁵ '“history” appears reified, fragmented, fabricated — both imploded and depleted'.⁷⁶ Similarly, Jameson claims that when postmodern art does reach out to history, it is to cannibalise randomly all its styles and to turn the past into what Guy Debord terms 'spectacles' and Baudrillard calls 'simulacra'.⁷⁷

The new spatial logic of the simulacrum can now be expected to have a momentous effect on what used to be historical time. The past is thereby itself modified: what was once, in the historical novel as Lukács defines it, the organic genealogy of the bourgeois collective project [...] has meanwhile become a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum. Guy Debord's powerful slogan is now even more apt for the 'prehistory' of a society bereft of all historicity, one whose own putative past is little more than a set of dusty spectacles. [...] [T]he past as referent finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts.⁷⁸

Concerning the historicity of contemporary film, Jameson dismisses its interest in the past as a manifestation of nostalgia, which he deems incompatible

72 Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 5 and p. 16.

73 Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', p. 386, emphasis added.

74 *Ibidem*, p. 393.

75 Hal Foster, '(Post)Modern Polemics', *New German Critique*, 33 (Autumn 1984), 67–78 (pp. 67–8).

76 *Ibidem*, p. 69.

77 Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 18.

78 *Idem*.

with genuine historicity, and castigates the way these 'nostalgia films' set in the 1930s or 1950s convey 'pastness' with the glossy quality of the image.⁷⁹ The remake, on the other hand, offers us pseudohistorical depth, 'in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces "real" history'.⁸⁰

This approach to the present by the way [...] of the pastiche of the stereotypical past, endows present reality and the openness of present history with the spell and distance of a glossy mirage. Yet this mesmerising new aesthetic mode itself emerged as an elaborated symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way.⁸¹

Finally, today's historical novel, represented for Jameson by the prose of E. L. Doctorow, which, interestingly, serves Hutcheon as a perfect example of historiographic metafiction, is but a 'postmodern artefact'⁸² that, using pastiche and parody, creates the uncanny sense of déjà vu. By saying so, Jameson means that, bereft of realism, contemporary historical fiction can no longer represent the historical past; 'it can only "represent" our ideas and stereotypes about the past (which thereby at once becomes "pop history")'.⁸³

Without fully engaging Jameson's or Eagleton's vociferous critique of postmodernism, I see some of the two critics' comments as relevant to the analysed corpus, especially when it comes to the commodification and serialisation of today's art, and to nostalgia.⁸⁴ This is because Makine plays with the notion of serialisation in literature, which he does by practicing intratextual re-writing, that is by retelling his own stories or at least by recycling tropes, characters and episodes. Writers' reiterative impulse, frequently illustrated with the intratextual relationship linking Marguerite Duras's Indochina trilogy,⁸⁵ can certainly be viewed as postmodern, Duras's own work being haunted by transience and doubt with regard to fiction's mimetic quality, not to mention its metafictional character.⁸⁶ Also, like the renarrativisation of others' texts,

79 *Ibidem*, p. 19.

80 *Ibidem*, p. 20.

81 *Ibidem*, p. 21.

82 *Ibidem*, p. 22.

83 *Ibidem*, p. 25.

84 Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', p. 385.

85 The trilogy is constituted by *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950), *L'Amant* (1980) and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991).

86 Cathy Jellenik, *Rewriting Rewriting: Marguerite Duras, Annie Ernaux, and Marie Redonnet* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 3.

intratextual rewriting flaunts the novel's artifice, all this in line with the post-modern contestation of aesthetic originality and textual closure, as well as of the concept of *mimesis* itself.

In Makine's oeuvre the most flagrant example of intratextual repetition is *Jacques Dorme* which, retelling the story already narrated by *Le Testament*, justifies its existence by claiming to be the earlier text's 'uncensored' version and hence a 'true' account of events as they had happened. *Jacques Dorme* thus raises questions about the truth and fictiveness of both history and literary texts, as well as about the role of imagination in creating historically accurate stories. Unlike the award-winning book that, we are now told, took its final shape under the pressure from publishers insisting that some of its aspects were '[t]rop vrai[s] pour un roman' ['too true for a novel'] (*TCJD*, 37), *Jacques Dorme* pledges not to have recourse to fiction. Yet, like Duras's *L'Amant*, which despite presenting itself as a candid version of *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* continues to grapple metatextually with the overwhelming task of narrating one's life in a reliable, linear and logical manner, *Jacques Dorme* was marketed as a novel while its narrator stops short of fully identifying with the author. Also, despite his promise to act as a simple chronicler who founds the story of the eponymous French pilot solely on available documents and oral testimonies, the narrator succumbs to the temptation of filling in the gaps by using his imagination. Such a narrative technique seems to invert the afore-mentioned postmodern tendency to foreground literary production's fictionality, illustrating Eagleton's conception of postmodern aesthetics as a dark parody of the early twentieth-century avant-garde's anti-representationalism: 'if art no longer reflects, it is not because it seeks to change the world rather than mimic it, but because there is in truth nothing there to be reflected, no reality which is not itself already image, spectacle, simulacrum, gratuitous fiction.'⁸⁷ That it is fair to cite the neo-Marxist critic's remark in relation to Makine's writing is confirmed by *Jacques Dorme* itself and by what may be seen as its avant-texte, *Fleuve Amour* and *Le Testament*, which all self-reflexively expose what Eagleton calls the commodification, fetishisation and libidinalisation of reality within postmodern aesthetics.⁸⁸ The three novels do so by concentrating on their protagonist-narrator's efforts to reconstruct French reality from a haphazard and motley collection of dated documents, which, as we will see later in this chapter, results in an aberrant and invariably sexualised vision of France. This vision, however, proves indefinitely more attractive than today's Hexagon,

87 Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', p. 387.

88 *Idem*.

which Makinean protagonists find regrettably liberal, multicultural, neglectful of its past and crippled by political correctness.

Makinean protagonists' rejection of the present for the sake of a textualised and 'commodified' past brings me to my second point which concerns nostalgia, a feeling in which many of the author's heroes unashamedly wallow, while some, as illustrated by *Le Testament* or *Requiem*, are even driven by the hateful here and now to self-destruction. Indeed, according to Boym, nostalgia is not always about the bygone days, as the fantasies of the past are determined by the present:⁸⁹ 'Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defence mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals', and manifests itself as a longing for an 'elsewhere, another time, a better life.'⁹⁰ As for its relation to postmodernism, nostalgia has been another debateable topic. Representing postmodernism's advocates, Hutcheon passionately postulates the movement's dissociation from any such sentimental pining for the bygone times and argues that postmodern art critically revisits the past and reformulates tradition, cutting itself off from the immobilising and reactionary nostalgia of which it has often been accused.⁹¹ Conversely, Jameson and Eagleton not only identify nostalgia as a hallmark of postmodernism but also demean it by stripping it of its revolutionary edge that characterised Walter Benjamin's 'painful straining towards a psychic wholeness or unity of experience',⁹² resulting from a 'lucid and remorseless dissatisfaction with the present' and taking on the form of an obsession with memory.⁹³ For, although as political motivation nostalgia is frequently associated with fascism, there is no reason why, as in Benjamin's case, it should not be conceived of as 'a revolutionary stimulus'.⁹⁴ Developing Jameson's thoughts, Eagleton overtly brands the German-Jewish philosopher's nostalgia 'revolutionary'⁹⁵ and bestows on it 'the power of active remembrance as a ritual summoning and invocation of the traditions of the oppressed in violent constellations with the political present.'⁹⁶ Conversely,

89 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. xvi.

90 *Ibidem*, p. xiv.

91 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 201.

92 Fredric Jameson, 'Walter Benjamin, or Nostalgia', *Salmagundi*, 10/11 (Autumn 1969/Winter 1970), 52–68 (p. 53).

93 *Ibidem*, p. 67.

94 *Ibidem*, p. 68.

95 Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', p. 389.

96 *Idem*.

when analysing postmodernism, the two Marxist critics talk of 'nostalgia deco'⁹⁷ or of 'reactionary nostalgia'.⁹⁸

It has been frequently noted that Makine's writing is steeped in a longing for the past,⁹⁹ be it for the France of La Belle Époque or for the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁰ Although the Franco-Russian author shows it to be responsible for countless personal tragedies, not to mention the persecution of entire ethnic groups and communities such as the Volga Germans or the Balkars, he vindicates the Soviet system as capable of nurturing intrinsically Russian values, such as communality, spirituality and *intelligentnost*, while, crucially, helping to maintain Russia in the position of a world superpower. If the overall argument of the present study is that Makine's keen interest in the Great Fatherland War stems precisely from his nostalgia for Soviet times, in Chapter 3 I return specifically to the author's longing for *sobornost*, a quasi-untranslatable religious term which, secularised in the nineteenth century by the Slavophile philosophers, designates a common bond uniting members of a community,¹⁰¹ and opposes the Western concepts of the individual and identity.¹⁰² In my reading of *Confession*, I demonstrate that Makine reinforces the idealisation of the USSR with the chronotope of the *kommunalka* (communal apartment), which, although reviled by those who have personally experienced this form of living, is fondly remembered by the author's protagonists as the locus of the inherently Russian way of life. This rose-tinted view of the *kommunalka* and, by extension, of the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, which, significantly, coincided

97 Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalism*, p. xvi.

98 Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 32.

99 See, for example, Adrian Wanner, 'Russian Hybrids: Identity in the Translingual Writings of Andreï Makine, Wladimir Kaminer, and Gary Shteyngart', *Slavic Review*, 63.3 (Autumn 2008), 662–81 (p. 671); Katherine Knorr, 'Andreï Makine's Poetics of Nostalgia', *The New Criterion* (March 1996), 32–36; Ray Taras, 'À la recherche du pays perdu': Andreï Makine's Russia', *East European Quarterly*, 34.1 (March 2000), 51–79.

100 I have addressed Makine's nostalgia for the Soviet Union in several articles. See, for example, Helena Duffy, 'The Russian Exile's Feeling for Snow: The Maternal Connotations of Aquatic Landscapes in Andreï Makine's Oeuvre', *Essays in French Literature and Culture*, 47 (November 2010), 65–86; 'La France que j'oublie d'aimer. Vision(s) of France in the Work of Andreï Makine', *Essays in French Literature and Culture*, 45 (2008), 19–42; or 'Grandmothers and Uncles: The Role and Status of Old People in Lidia Bobrova's *Babousya* and Andreï Makine's Novels', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 47.2 (April 2011), 157–69.

101 Wallace L. Daniel, *The Orthodox Church and Civil Society in Russia* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press: 2006), p.74.

102 Boym, *Common Places*, p. 3. For a definition and discussion of *sobornost*, see Rancour-Laferrère, p. 38.

with Makine's own childhood and adolescence, is contrasted with, on the one hand, the West and, on the other hand, the times of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, and the 'rowdy 1990s' (*likhie devianostye*) that in Russian popular imagination are connected with lawlessness and normlessness (*bespredel*) stamping the country's abrupt transition from communism to capitalism.¹⁰³

To expand on this, the West, as depicted by Makine's prose, is a money-driven, decadent, over-sexualised and violent place, where a Russian émigré can feel but forlorn, alienated and, consequently, melancholy, as does Alyosha of *Confession* when, poised in the middle of an unpleasantly noisy and overcrowded Parisian junction, he realises his inexorable difference from his hosts. Additionally, in contrast to Soviet Russia, the West is defined by its disregard for the past, and especially for the memory of World War II, as evidenced by the Parisians' ignorance about Stalingrad (*La Fille*), people allowing their dogs to foul the tombs of the Great War combatants (*Jacques Dorme*), and boisterous youths harassing a World War II veteran (*Jacques Dorme*). Since Makine regards knowledge of history as any community's foundational element, the French, neglectful of their past as they are, are figured as predestined for extinction. Described in *Le Testament* with eschatological imagery, Paris is a town on the verge of annihilation, its once glorious culture being threatened by a swarm of non-European immigrants who, as the novel implies, pollute the French capital's once pristine, all-white *quartiers*. That the situation is no better in the provinces transpires from *Jacques Dorme*, which is partly set in Roubaix,¹⁰⁴ a post-industrial northern town whose facades are covered by offensive graffiti and streets strewn with rubbish, while the only people still daring to leave their houses are veiled Arab women with no French.¹⁰⁵ Even less hospitable and more dangerous than France is America, which Dostoyevsky had already seen as synonymous with suicide,¹⁰⁶ and which Makine himself repeatedly links with violence, as illustrated by the attempted assassination

103 Boris Koshubei, 'The Rise and Fall of Social Man', in *Psychology of Russia: Past, Present, Future*, ed. by Elena Grigorenko, Patricia Ruzgis and Robert J. Sternberg (New York: Nova Publishers, 1997), pp. 337–66. Koshubei explains the term as 'the absence of norms or limits to goals and power or the means of achieving them'. At the same time '[t]he mention of moral principles is perceived as stupid or foolish [...]'. Morality is not rejected; there is simply none of it', p. 348.

104 In *Cette France qu'on oublie d'aimer* Makine relates an interview during which a journalist accused him of a reactionary conception of today's France and identified the anonymous town as Roubaix. *Cette France qu'on oublie d'aimer* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), pp. 94–5.

105 For Makine's novelistic representation of France, see Duffy, 'La France que j'oublie d'aimer'.

106 Boym, *Common Places*, p. 32.

of *Requiem*'s protagonist or by the terrorist attack that leaves Arkady's young daughter mutilated (*La Femme*).

In Makine's more recent fiction the West's moral and spiritual decline is matched or even outstripped by *perestroika*-time and post-Soviet Russia which, as evidenced by *La Fille*, *L'Homme inconnu* or *Une femme aimée*, is dominated by greed, violence, egoism, materialism and sexual promiscuity, and which no longer cares for its simultaneously glorious and tragic past. Here now too war veterans elicit little respect, as instantiated by the attack on Sacha Semyonov in a Moscow metro station in the mid-1980s (*La Fille*) or that on Ivan Shutov taking place some twenty years later in Saint Petersburg's Field of Mars (*L'Homme inconnu*). Crucially, the latter incident is staged at a monument commemorating the heroes of both the October Revolution and, less directly, the siege of Leningrad, which Shutov's attackers desecrate when they drink beer, throw empty bottles, scuffle and, finally, urinate into the Eternal Flame. As I discuss in Chapters 3 and 5, another sign of the new generation's disrespect for the past is found in *L'Homme inconnu*, whose elderly protagonist is evicted from his *kommunalka*, while the hill where Volsky once sang under fire has become the site of a gated and obnoxiously luxurious housing complex destined for New Russians. In turn, *Une femme aimée* fleshes out post-Soviet society's vagaries with the Dantesque spectacle of an elderly cancer patient who, unable to afford palliative care for which one now must pay in hard currency, is writhing in pain in his hospital bed.¹⁰⁷

The only haven from the jungle Russia has become can be found in a remote corner of Siberia to where *Jacques Dorme*'s protagonist-narrator peregrinates searching for the eponymous pilot's remains. The protagonist's quest for his imaginary origins coincides with his nostalgic pursuit of the Soviet past, which he finds, so to speak, congealed in the land of permafrost and quasi-eternal night. The protagonist's journey to a land untouched by capitalism, globalisation or feminism invokes a return to one's antenatal life, the rope on to which he holds when negotiating his way through tall snowdrifts and total darkness being reminiscent of the umbilical cord. At the end of the rope the protagonist finds a snow-enveloped, womb-like *izba* wherein vodka flows freely, convivial atmosphere reigns, crude jokes are told and traditional relationships between sexes have been preserved. The wooden house is home to two geologists and their female cook who all seem to stand guard to what remains of a Soviet lifestyle. Both named Lev (in English Leo), the two men bring to

107 For Makine's portrayal of the situation of the elderly in post-communist Russia, see Duffy, 'Grandmothers and Uncles'.

mind the pair of stone lions adorning the Lobanov-Rostovsky Palace in Saint Petersburg and denoting authority, strength and protection. As for the woman, she wordlessly serves the men hearty food and strong alcohol before retiring to her bedroom to pour over hefty Socialist Realist novels. Her corpulence and squinted eyes are supposed to make her the epitome of Soviet identity. This is because her physique hints at the interbreeding of geographically and culturally distant nations such as the Yakuts and the Ukrainians, which resulted from what Makine portrays in *Fleuve Amour* as a largely peaceful colonisation of Eastern Siberia by the Cossacks.¹⁰⁸ Silent and subservient, this hybrid female fits in with both Makine's misogynistic conception of women and the ideal of a pan-Soviet identity championed by the communists and, as we will see in Chapter 4, promulgated the Franco-Russian author himself. Thus, under the pretext of commemorating a little-known aspect of World War II, which was the existence of the ALSIB,¹⁰⁹ the episode relating the protagonist's Siberian trip brings together the celebration of Soviet wartime heroics and nostalgia for communality, hospitality and generosity, which in metropolitan Russia have now been sadly destroyed by the onslaught of Western ways and values.

To conclude this section, if Makine's preoccupation with the past gives credence to Hutcheon's rather than Jameson's or Eagleton's position on post-modernism's engagement with history, the nostalgia permeating the author's oeuvre unequivocally corroborates the two Marxist critics' conception of the movement. Moreover, as we have seen, in Makine's case it is hard to talk of revolutionary or, to draw on Boym's typology, 'good' or 'reflective' nostalgia, which, for the critic, is apolitical or, if otherwise, is associated with subversive, critical or progressive ideologies.¹¹⁰ Conversely, as I postulate throughout this book, despite Makine's attempts to draw a line between the kindly, courageous and ever-suffering Russian people and their violent regime, by glorifying the Soviet era, and in particular by glossing over or justifying the Soviet state's crimes towards both its own and other nations, the author's prose becomes complicit with the Soviet metanarrative. Hence, damning as it may seem, the Franco-Russian author's prose voices a 'reactionary', 'bad' or 'restorative' nostalgia, which Boym attributes to those who do not believe themselves nostalgic and think their project to be about *truth*, as does indeed Makine. Finally, Makinean

108 I analyse this in detail in 'L'Orient en tant que carrière: la Russie, l'Occident et l'Orient dans *Au temps du fleuve Amour*', in *Représentation des Russes et de la Russie dans le roman français des XX et XXI siècles*, ed. by Murielle Lucie Clément (Berlin: Éditions Universitaires Européennes, 2011), pp. 261–91.

109 ALSIB was the Russian fragment of the Alaska-Siberia Air Road receiving American-manufactured aircraft to fight on the Eastern Front during World War II.

110 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, pp. 49–55.

narrators corroborate not only Boym's association of nostalgia with nationalism, reactionary politics and myth-making of history through a revival of national symbols and conspiracy theories,¹¹¹ but also her conception of nostalgia as the inability to deal with the present.

Can It Ever Be Possible to Write about War in a Novel?

'Saura-t-on jamais dire la guerre dans un roman'? ['Can it ever be possible to write about war in a novel?'] is how a journalist terminates an interview with Ivan Shutov of *L'Homme inconnu*,¹¹² another of Makine's fictional *Doppelgängers* (VHI, 43). To answer this rhetorical question, the interviewee reflects upon the novelist's moral responsibility to bear witness and to seek truth. It matters little, he continues, if this truth should be textual rather than empirically gained, as instantiated by Tolstoy's representation of the battle of Borodino owing more to Stendhal's description of Waterloo than to historical record.

The afore-summarised passage is one of the many instances of the meta-fictional self-awareness of Makine's novels, which thus align themselves with postmodern literature, chiefly characterised by, in Hutcheon's terms, historicity and self-reflexivity. Although Hutcheon is aware that no language is completely self-effacing,¹¹³ while for Patricia Waugh 'metafiction is a tendency or function inherent in *all* novels,'¹¹⁴ and for Wesseling 'self-reflexivity seems to be a general property of historical fiction,'¹¹⁵ metafictional self-awareness is unarguably more palpable in postmodern historical literature than in its classical predecessor. Indeed, while historiographic metafiction makes the paradoxes of postmodernism 'overt and defining,'¹¹⁶ the novel à la Walter Scott displays its trust in both the scientific approach to history and in the possibility of an impartial representation of events. It does so by, among others, having a 'seamless' structure, that is by representing the past by the disembodied voice of the heterodiegetic and omniscient narrator who offers an intelligible account of the

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

¹¹² This and all the following translations of quotations from *La Vie d'un homme inconnu* come from *The Life of an Unknown Man*, trans. by Geoffrey Strachan (London: Sceptre, 2010).

¹¹³ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 42.

¹¹⁴ Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 5.

¹¹⁵ Wesseling, p. 86.

¹¹⁶ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 41.

past events as well as their interpretation.¹¹⁷ Contrary to classical historical literature, historiographic metafiction openly questions the possibility of knowing what happened and, consequently, of providing an objective, univocal and complete account of the past. This is because, explains Waugh, contemporary metafictional writing is a response to the sense that 'reality and history are provisional: no longer a world of external verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures.'¹¹⁸ The problems arising from the retrospective retrieval of history are thus turned into, in Wesseling's words, 'a subject for explicit reflection'.¹¹⁹ 'Instead of presenting the reader with the finished product of a well-made story, [postmodern] novelists make the production process visible'.¹²⁰ To do so, they use a technique that Wesseling brands 'subjectivisation of history'. In practice this means that historical consciousness is embodied by an external narrator or a historian/detective-like character who comments upon his endeavours as he goes along, often juxtaposing diverging views on the same historical subject.¹²¹ For Wesseling, subjectivisation of history goes hand in hand with the ploy of self-reflexivity, the former affecting the object-level and the latter the meta-level of historical representation. Moreover, while subjectivisation of history makes a metahistorical statement metaphorically and implicitly, self-reflexivity does so explicitly and pertains to intellectual and epistemological concerns, rather than being informed by psychological interest.¹²² Finally, historiographic metafiction questions the modes of historical representation, including the very medium of the historical novel. In so doing, it reflects the concerns of contemporary philosophy of history as represented by Hayden White,¹²³ Dominick LaCapra¹²⁴ or Frank Ankersmit.¹²⁵

117 Wesseling, p. 77.

118 Waugh, p. 7.

119 Wesseling, p. 119.

120 *Idem*.

121 *Ibidem*, p. 82.

122 *Idem*.

123 These concerns have been raised by Hayden White in the following articles: 'Interpretation in History', *New Literary History*, 4.2 (Winter 1973), 282–314; 'Historicism, History, and the Figurative Imagination', *History and Theory*, 14.4 (December 1975), 48–67; 'The Narrativisation of Real Events', *Critical Inquiry*, 7.4 (Summer 1981), 793–98; 'The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation', *Critical Inquiry*, 9.1 (September 1982), 113–37; 'The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory'; and 'Historical Pluralism', *Critical Inquiry*, 12.3 (Spring 1986), 480–93.

124 Dominick LaCapra, 'Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts', *History and Theory*, 19.3 (October 1980), 245–76.

125 F. R. Ankersmit, *History and Topology: The Rise and Fall of the Metaphor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

Postulating the narrativist rather than epistemological character of the discourse about the past, these philosophers of history shift the emphasis from the nature of the facts to the way they are described, with the view of sanctioning one mode of explaining them rather than another.¹²⁶

In this and remaining sections we will see that, following the work of post-modern historical writers and, by extension, of the afore-mentioned contemporary philosophers of history, Makine's novels openly discuss issues such as the relationship between veracity and verisimilitude, the limits of historical certainty, the role of interpretation in history writing, the position of documents in historical inquiry, or historiography's political dimension. As it happens in historiographic metafiction, in Makine's prose all this is achieved thanks to the presence of an additional narrative level and of a protagonist-narrator. As a writer, the latter gathers material for a novel about his own parents' wartime past (*Confession*), a French fighter pilot's military service (*Jacques Dorme*), the life of an exiled Russian princess (*Olga Arbélina*), or the reign of Catherine the Great (*Une femme aimée*). Such a narrative structure opens up a space for reflections upon the retrieval of the past and the problems attached to the turning of the collected data into a cohesive and coherent story with a univocal meaning. To exemplify this, in Chapters 3 and 5 I examine the narratorial interventions in *Confession* and *L'Homme inconnu*, that both explicitly privilege individualised historical truth, criticise historical writing that obeys the realistic mode, and put historical literature above historiography, which they deem impersonal, driven by the concerns of the present, construed from the point of view of the ruling elites and thus inevitably politically-biased. Before doing so, I will now concentrate on *Requiem* and *Jacques Dorme*, whose narrators dwell upon literature's role in disseminating historical knowledge and upon the historical novelist's challenges and responsibilities.

Even if this statement also applies to Makine's other fictions, *Requiem* has been aptly described as highlighting 'the precedence of subjective memory over official history, and the power of narrative to simultaneously evoke and perpetuate memory.'¹²⁷ In Makine's sixth novel, these issues are overtly discussed by the nameless protagonist-narrator summoned by his former colleague and lover to tell the *truth* about the Soviet era. In response to the dead woman's plea, that punctuates the text with the insistence of a haunting refrain, the narrator agrees, however reluctantly, to act as a witness. He feels overwhelmed by 'cette idée irréalisable' ['this impracticable idea'] (*RE*, 23) and

126 Hayden White, 'The Fictions of Factual Representation', in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 101–34 (p. 134).

127 Julie Hansen, 'Requiem pour l'Est', *The Literary Encyclopedia*, 30 August 2011 <<http://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=32150>>.

thinks himself an unsuitable chronicler since, having spent his childhood in an orphanage for the children of disgraced parents, all he knows is the margins of normative Soviet society:¹²⁸ 'J'imaginai un témoin — moi! confus, manquant de mots, désespéré par l'énormité de la tâche.' ['I pictured a witness — myself! Confused, lost for words, stunned by the enormity of the task.'] (*RE*, 21–2) Moreover, the reality he must salvage from oblivion or, worse still, from malignant misrepresentations by Western intellectuals, now seems remote to the point of having become legendary, as implied by the USSR's comparison to a desert left by a vanished ocean, or by its description as 'un monde inexistant' ['a non-existent world'] or as 'un néant' ['a void'] (*RE*, 99): 'Témoigner sur ce que nous avons vécu eût été parler d'un océan disparu, évoquer ses lames de fond et les victimes de ses tempêtes devant l'impassable vallonement des sables. Oui, prêcher dans le désert.' ['Bearing witness to what we had lived through would have meant speaking of a vanished ocean, evoking its groundswells and the victims of its storms, while faced with the impassive undulations of the sand. Yes, preaching in the desert.'] (*RE*, 22) While conveying the narrator's felt powerlessness, this passage figures the USSR's breakup as a natural disaster of biblical proportions and underscores the victimhood of the Soviet people who are compared to 'des poissons piégés par le recul de la mer.' ['fish trapped by the ebbing of the sea.'] (*RE*, 22) The reference to Saint John's preaching in the wilderness transforms the narrator into a prophet-like figure calling for repentance and promising renewal and salvation, while the parallel established between Soviet Russia and the shattered armoured vehicle seen by the protagonist in some war-ravaged country is meant to elicit the readers' sympathy for the dismembered Soviet empire. The narrator achieves this by personifying the tank; he first considers it in relation to the torn-off arm of an innocent victim of postcolonial violence, and then describes it as 'un être insolite, une bête de guerre futuriste' ['a rare creature, a futurist war beast'] that has been disembowelled, its brain exploded and, its radio still receiving messages, vainly albeit desperately trying to communicate its agony to the world (*RE*, 24).

Having surmounted his initial reservations about the subjectivity and incompleteness of his account, the narrator picks up the gauntlet, yet his efforts to produce a comprehensive and chronological account fail:

[C]et effort de précision m'écartait de ce que nous avons véritablement vécu. J'essayais d'inventorier les forces politiques, les raisons des conflits, les figures des chefs d'État ... [...] Je comprenais qu'au lieu de

128 This and all the following translations of quotations from *Requiem pour l'Est* come from *Requiem for the East*, trans. by Geoffrey Strachan (London: Sceptre, 2001).

cet inventaire de faits avec sa prétention d'objectivité historique, il fallait raconter la trame tout simple, souvent invisible, souterraine, de la vie.

[But, overwhelmingly, my striving after precise details was taking me away from what we had truly experienced. I tried to make a list of political forces at work, the causes and conflicts, the notable heads of state ... [...] I realised that, in place of this inventory of facts, with its pretensions to historical objectivity, I should be describing the quite simple, often invisible, subterranean fabric of life.]

RE, 99

As a result, to capture the essence of the Soviet era, the narrator invokes a series of snapshot-like images meant to reflect the inevitably disjointed and subjective character of human memory, and perhaps also metaphorising the dismemberment of the Soviet Union: 'Il m'arrivait, de plus en plus souvent, de m'avouer que c'est dans ces éclats du passé que se condensait l'essentiel.' ['More and more often I found myself admitting that what was essential was condensed into these glimpses of the past.'] (RE, 100) However, even if such a narrative strategy is symptomatic of the subjectivity and fragmentation characterising postmodern poetics,¹²⁹ I will now argue that the narrator's choice of separate historical instances over a linear and cohesive narrative is not free from an ulterior political motive and that, supporting a conservative agenda, he ultimately creates a totalising and pre-interpreted vision of the USSR's role in postwar world politics.

The three mnemonic 'snapshots' are attached to the protagonist's intelligence missions as a KGB agent during the various postcolonial wars in Asia, Africa or South America, which the USSR saw as an opportunity to spread socialism to the developing countries and thus extend its zone of influence. The first image is that of Ron Scalper, a self-satisfied British (or American?) arms dealer whose surname itself captures his quasi-illegal profiteering. Apart from designating someone reselling theatre tickets at a profit, the surname alludes to the act of cutting off the scalp with the hair of the enemy's head as a battle trophy, an act customarily associated with clashes between American Indians and White colonisers who, as William Marder claims, were in fact the ones who 'taught the Indians how to scalp in volume and without reason.'¹³⁰ This means that despite claiming to be unable to explain postcolonial violence, the

¹²⁹ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 116.

¹³⁰ William Marder, *Indians in the Americas: The Untold Story* (San Diego: Book Tree, 2005), p. 107.

narrator accuses the West — rather than Soviet Russia — of exacerbating intertribal conflicts in countries where, he admits, the USA and the USSR were fighting out the battles of the Cold War. To render Scalper and, by extension, the West yet more abhorrent, the narrator imagines the arms dealer to be fleeing the beleaguered land into the arms of his young mistress whose charms he buys with money stained with the blood of innocent victims. To leave no doubt as to Scalper's immorality, heartlessness and greed, Makine brings him again into the story, this time as the sponsor of documentaries conveying an allegedly fraudulent version of World War II. If these films' alleged political aim is to convince the public of the Western Allies' critical role in defeating fascism and thus demean Soviet contribution to the war effort, their economic — and primary — objective is to boost the sales of American-manufactured weapons.

That Scalper's carnal pleasures are indeed paid for with the carnage the protagonist witnessed, is proven by the second 'snapshot' that shows a teenage arm severed from some adolescent's body by a rocket. What individualises this otherwise anonymous death is a leather bracelet adorning the wrist, a detail that, in Barthesian sense, serves as the *punctum* — 'une piqûre, petit trou, petite tache, petite coupure' ['sting, speck, cut, little hole']¹³¹ —, focalising the viewers' attention, distressing them and inciting their sympathy for the young life wasted by war.¹³² The cruel juxtaposition of Scalper's voluptuousness and the stray body fragment leads the narrator to the somewhat puzzling conclusion that truth is 'd'une logique et d'un arbitraire absolus' ['logical and absolutely arbitrary'] (*RE*, 26), a statement that conveys his purported inability to blame whomever for the bloodshed. Yet, as we have seen, despite this typically postmodern claim to undecidability, the novel *univocally* locates the responsibility for the adolescent's death with the insatiable — both financially and sexually — West.

Evidently following Hegelian dialectics of history and knowledge, the narrator resolves the opposition between his two memories, which constitute the thesis (Scalper's greed and lust) and antithesis (innocent deaths), by proposing a third image that moves away from the pair, offering the path to truth. The synthesis is the memory of the protagonist's fellow spy who, after guerillas had ransacked the two undercover agents' house, was patiently and silently darning a damaged mosquito net. Since the torn net has been read

131 Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 1980), p. 49. This and all the following translations of quotations from *La Chambre claire* come from *Camera Lucida*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993).

132 *Ibidem*, pp. 69–70.

as a metaphor of the Iron Curtain being undone,¹³³ the woman's handiwork could be interpreted as the efforts made by the USSR's loyal agents to patch up the threadbare fabric of Soviet teleology. The illusion that things can still be mended created by this image of timeless femininity calms and comforts the protagonist, convincing him that there is a life beyond politics and violence that is worth living, recording and celebrating:

Tu étais là et la complexité meurtrière de ce monde, cet enchevêtrement des guerres, des avidités, des vengeances, des mensonges se trouvait face à une *vérité* qui se passait d'arguments. Cette *vérité* était suspendue à ton geste: une main qui referme les pans du tissu sur la nuit gorgée de mort. Je sentis que *tous les témoignages que j'aurais pu apporter étaient dépassés par la vérité de cet instant arraché à la folie des hommes.*

[You were there and the murderous complexity of this world, this tangle of wars, greed, vengeance and lies, found itself face to face with a *truth* beyond dispute. This *truth* was poised in your gesture: a hand closing up two pieces of fabric against a night glutted with death. I sensed that *all the testimonies I could have offered were overtaken by the truth of that moment, snatched from the madness of men.*]

RE, 26–27, emphasis added

Later in the novel, the same scene will serve the narrator to oppose the intimacy of individual memories to impersonal historiography, and to justify his move away from a systematic description of the past to mnemonic fragments, from the collective to the particular, from the objective to the subjective, and, finally, from facts to impressions.

Despite the apparent affinity between *Requiem's* poetics and those of post-modern fiction, by situating Soviet history within the dialectical mould, and, consequently, proposing a clear-cut solution to the supposedly unresolvable conflict, *Requiem* inverts the pattern established by historiographic metafiction that 'installs totalising order, only to contest it, by its radical provisionality, intertextuality, and, often, fragmentation.'¹³⁴ Indeed, having dismissed the possibility of a comprehensive representation of his country's past and having resorted to the poetics of fragment, the narrator offers his readers the

133 Katya von Knorring, 'Requiem pour l'Est: Le triptyque des femmes', in *Andreï Makine: Perspectives russes*, ed. by Margaret Parry, Marie Louise Scheidhauer and Edward Welch (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), pp. 69–79 (p. 76).

134 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 116.

unquestionable *truth* about Russia's engagement in postcolonial wars around the globe. Additionally, his conception of his homeland's politics goes hand in hand with his stereotypical vision of men as warmongers and women as Vermeerian icons of silent femininity, although in reality the woman darning the mosquito net is a Soviet spy and so is hardly confined to the domestic realm.¹³⁵

Further examples of metatextuality may be found in *Jacques Dorme*, which, to borrow Hutcheon's words, presents 'the fictively personal [as] the historically — and thus politically — public', all this being done with intense self-consciousness.¹³⁶ In other words, Makine's eighth novel is about blurring the difference between history and literature, as it presents itself as a true account of both the narrator's Soviet childhood and the eponymous French pilot's life, yet without ever definitely confirming its non-fictional status. The novel makes its claim to veracity with metafictional comments concerning its genesis and the narrator's conception of history and historical literature. And so *Jacques Dorme*'s narrator explains his urge to retell his childhood, which has already been traced by what we guess to be *Le Testament*, with his desire to reinstate the two characters — Jacques Dorme and General de Gaulle — who allegedly featured in the unedited version of the award-winning book but who were then scrapped on a publisher's advice. In airbrushing the two Frenchmen the narrator feels, paradoxically, akin to Stalin who ordered an ongoing re-writing of the past, trying to erase certain historical personages from people's consciousness. In Makine's own oeuvre this process is illustrated in *Requiem* where, leafing through his son's school manual, Nikolai notices that some official's picture has been carefully blotted out. Similarly, in *Confession* Marshall Kliment Voroshilov's portrait is confined to a storeroom holding objects threatening to spoil the pristine image of a pioneer camp that in the novel acts as a microcosm of the Soviet Union. Yet, in contrast to these two examples where Makinean narrators demonstrate little sympathy for those relegated to the dustbin of history, *Jacques Dorme*'s narrator responds to the publisher's decision to drop the two Frenchmen with much less indifference. For him, this editorial choice encapsulates the French nation's growing lack of respect for their forebears' wartime heroics, or rather, the way I see it, the diminishing currency of the resistentialist view of France's role in World War II in the face of the iconoclastic narrative of the

135 For a study of Makine's representation of women see von Knorring.

136 Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, pp. 156–57.

'Vichy syndrome'.¹³⁷ In addition, the narrator recognises a troubling parallel between the publisher's gesture and Stalin's memory politics that, in line with the official version of the war that glossed over the help of Western Allies,¹³⁸ consigned both ALSIB and foreigners fighting with the Red Army to oblivion, thus supressing Jacques's legacy on two counts. We then learn that the publisher's other suggestion was aimed at rendering the story more plausible and *literary*, although it had already been heavily fictionalised, since at the time the protagonist believed that 'seule la fiction pouvait rendre lisible l'in vraisemblance du réel.' ['only a novel could render the improbabilities of real life readable.'] (*TCJD*, 35) Such a narrative strategy had also been dictated by the incompleteness and fragmentation of the pilot's record, metaphorised by the novel's opening image of Alexandra's broken amber necklace: 'Des bouts de vie que seule l'intrigue savait relier, des bouts d'amour dont seule l'imagination parvenait à faire une histoire amoureuse, une foule d'hommes et de femmes qu'il avait fallu rejeter dans l'oubli ...' ['Odd scraps of life experience that only the plot of a novel could link together, scraps of love that only imagination could fashion into a love story, and a vast throng of men and women who had had to be cast aside into oblivion ...'] (*TCJD*, 36–37) Now an established writer and hence free to follow through his narrative choices, *Jacques Dorme's* narrator promises not to fall back on imagination in his account of his own and the pilot's life. This means that Makine's eighth novel, which flaunts its adherence to the principle of veracity rather than verisimilitude, inverts the pattern established by historiographic metafiction that self-reflexively manifests 'its status as discourse, as a human construct'.¹³⁹ Conversely, while *Jacques Dorme's* autobiographical chapters are supposedly founded on shards of memory, Jacques's story is pieced together, we are told, from the letters he sent from the front to his lover, Alexandra, and from Alexandra's testimony based on her postwar conversation with Jacques's frontline comrade.

It is interesting to note that the autobiographical chapters, which are strongly metafictional, have a strikingly different narrative texture to those devoted to Jacques's military service, where the intrusive autodiegetic narrator disappears behind a disembodied and authoritative voice of an extradiegetic chronicler.

137 Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy de 1944 à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1990). In Bertram Gordon's formulation, the Vichy Syndrome is 'a synecdoche for arguments that depict an agonised postwar France somehow attempting to reconcile itself to its history.' Bertram M. Gordon, "The 'Vichy Syndrome' Problem in History", *French Historical Studies*, 19.2 (1995), 495–518 (p. 495).

138 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, pp. 85–7.

139 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 53.

The only exception is the passage where the use of free indirect discourse closes the gap between Jacques's thoughts and the narrator's metafictional musings condemning historiography's tendency to simplify and generalise, and to produce not only totalising and impersonal, but also ideologically-influenced accounts of the past:

Il [...] arriva souvent [à Jacques] de repenser à l'impossibilité d'expliquer la guerre; il se disait qu'après tout le monde en reparlerait, la commenterait, accuserait, justifierait. Tout le monde, surtout ceux qui ne l'auraient pas faite. Et tout serait clair alors: les ennemis et les Alliés, les justes et les monstres. Les années de combat seraient consignées, jour par jour, dans les mouvements des armées et les batailles glorieuses. On oublierait l'essentiel: le temps de guerre formait une multitude de minutes de guerre et derrière le vaste brassage des fronts s'embusquait parfois une cour ensoleillée, une journée de mars, un homme en cuir noir qui tuait un autre homme parce que l'envie lui venait de tuer et, dans la même journée, il y avait ce colonel Korymov, cet homme nu que se hâtait de se rassasier de la chair d'une femme avant d'être haché par la mitraille, et aussi ce jeune homme, les mâchoires refermées sur le fil télégraphique ...

[[Jacques] often found himself thinking again about the impossibility of explaining the war: telling himself that after the event everyone would talk about it, publish commentaries, accusations, justifications. Everyone, and, above all, those who had not fought in it. Everything would be crystal clear at last: enemies, allies, the righteous and the monsters. The years of fighting would be recorded, day after day, in terms of troop movements and glorious battles. The essential truth would be forgotten: that the whole of wartime was made of myriad moments of war, and that sometimes behind the vast turmoil of the fronts there lurked a sunlit courtyard, a March day, with a man in black leather killing another man because he felt like killing. And that on the very same day there would be a certain Colonel Korymov, a naked man, quickly satisfying his lust for the flesh of a woman before being cut to pieces by machine-gun fire. And also that young man, his jaws clenched around the telegraphic cable ...]

CTJD, 168–69

Much richer in metatextual comments are the chapters relaying the narrator's childhood, where the narratorial interjections pertain mainly to the opposition between autobiography and fiction, and place the book we are reading in the former category. An excellent example of this is the scene in which a fellow

orphan's vitriolic remark shatters the myth of a heroic father the narrator has been nurturing. If he were writing a novel, he states, he would be imagining 'maintes nuances à cette journée, [...] la douleur de cette journée' ['many nuances to that day and the pain of that day'], and would be inventing 'des jours qui l'ont précédée et suivie' ['days that led up to it and followed it.'] (*CTJD*, 52) Instead, he will give but the few concrete details preserved by his memory: the nosebleed he suffered during the ensuing brawl, the bathroom window overlooking a dreary landscape, and the first snowflakes melting into the mud of the road. And yet, these elements are all symbolically charged, the nosebleed, for example, signifying a loss of innocence. Such a reading is additionally confirmed by the association created in the protagonist's mind between blood and erotic pleasure, as his injury provides an opportunity for him to see a nurse he is secretly in love with. Also, the narrator locates this key biographical moment in November 1965, which saw the dismantlement of another legend, namely the personality cult of the nation's Father. Finally, this pivotal episode brings together the novel's diegetic and metafictional levels, as the end of the heroic father myth parallels the disappointment of our illusion of reading a fictive story.

Another strongly metafictional passage describes the protagonist's visit to the house of Alexandra, a Frenchwoman who was his parents' friend and who welcomes the boy on weekends:

Tout serait différent dans une histoire imaginée. Marquée d'un inutile exotisme: cette maison aux murs recouverts de lattes noires, d'un aspect lugubre à la nuit tombante, une pièce perdue dans l'entassement des appartements et l'obscurité des escaliers, une femme aux origines mystérieuses, ce vieux livre français ...

[It would all be different in a made-up story. Tinged with pointless exoticism: this house with its walls covered in dark weatherboarding, and its gloomy aspect in the approaching dusk; a room hidden away in a warren of apartments and shadowy staircases, a woman whose origins are shrouded in mystery; this ancient French book ...]

CTJD, 55

The afore-cited extract seems self-ironic in relation to the exoticised, stereotypical and, consequently, heavily criticised portrait of Russia painted by *Le Testament*.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, the award-winning novel features an old *izba* that is

140 See, for example, Tolstoya; or Gillespie, 'Bartavels, Ortolans, and Borshch'.

populated with a panoply of colourful characters, including a harmless drunk, representatives of the various ethnic groups making up the USSR, and a throng of *babushkas* gossiping on a bench in front of the *izba*. As if trying to rebuff the criticism levelled at *Le Testament*, the narrator announces that for him neither the wooden house nor communal living were exotic, but were simply part of his everyday existence.

The final scene that I will discuss is one that has been reworked from *Le Testament* and describes the young protagonist's friendship with an orphan nicknamed Village. Unlike his earlier incarnation, Pashka, who, as we will see later in this chapter, easily succumbs to the power of poetry, Village proves immune to the captivating beauty of mythological language by rejecting his mother's romanticised account of his father's death. Refusing to believe that it was out of a need to see him that his father tried to escape from a *gulag*, Village accepts the prosaic and cruel truth. It is thus potentially to honour Village's sobriety that the narrator, dreading 'la fausseté d'un pareil jeu d'esprit' ['the falseness of a contrivance of this kind'], resists the temptation to write a short story about the last twenty-four hours of his friend's life. Yet, although he claims to prefer to retain 'le peu que j'en savais et le dire en évitant toute tentation philosophique' ['what little I knew of them, [to] tell that and avoid the temptation to wax philosophical'] (*TCJD*, 107), he does fictionalise the last moments of Village's life when he presents events in a chronological order and imposes on them an extrinsic logic.

What is evident from the afore-analysed examples of the self-reflexivity of Makine's novel is the author's wish to unsettle the readers' understanding of both fact and fiction, as he openly considers the distinction between the two as 'infantine' ['childish'] (*TCJD*, 39). His stance reflects White's belief that although historiography seeks to be objective and realistic, 'by virtue of the unacknowledged *poetic* element in [its] discourse, [it] hides [its] own "subjectivity" and "culture-boundedness" from [itself].'¹⁴¹ Thus, despite overtly cutting himself off from literary invention, *Jacques Dorme's* narrator cannot help using the novelistic convention or respecting the rule of verisimilitude, as evidenced by the way he narrates his own, Alexandra's and Jacques' stories. Likewise, despite subscribing to the principle of veracity, he praises Tolstoy, whose notorious disrespect for historical detail and whose implausible characters and descriptions have been heavily censured. Enraged by his own publisher's criticism, the narrator empathises with the author of *War and Peace* who was admonished for his portrayal of General Kutuzov on the eve of the battle of Borodino: instead of reclining in an armchair and reading a French novel, the Saviour of Russia

141 White, 'Historicism, History, and the Figurative Imagination', p. 52.

should have been, his critics thought, pacing up and down his tent or pouring over battle plans. To such accusations Tolstoy himself reposted that

the artist and the historian have two entirely different objectives. Just as the historian would be wrong if he attempted to present a historical figure in all his entirety, in all his complicated connections to all aspects of life so an artist would not be doing his duty if he presented that figure in all of his historical significance.¹⁴²

In line with this reply, *Jacques Dorme's* narrator finds no fault with Tolstoy's writing technique and ponders upon the restraint imposed on novelists by historical veracity. He concludes that although Kutuzov's casual behaviour seems improbable, it is *true* because this is how Tolstoy imagined it. His position echoes that of Murray Krieger who exemplifies his discussion of the difference between history and literature with the very same scene: 'History's Kutuzov derives his status [...] from "evidence" outside even the system of historical discourse; Tolstoy's Kutuzov has only a "feigned" materiality, an imaginative identity controlled by the "form-giving power" of the author's imagination.'¹⁴³ Additionally, like Krieger, who talks about the writers' capacity to free themselves from history by reshaping it as they will, Makine's narrator believes in the novelists' right to retell the past by establishing a new and *true* version of events.¹⁴⁴ While such a doctrine fits in with the tenets of contemporary philosophy of history and of the postmodern historical novel, in the chapters to come I will consider the political ramifications of Makine's belief in the historical writer's creative licence and in the superiority of historical fiction over historiography, for his figurations of the Great Fatherland War, which, although strongly fictionalised, not to say mythologised, offer themselves as *true*.

Veracity vs. Verisimilitude

The problem of the perceived incompatibility of literature and historiography Makinean narrators grapple with goes back to Aristotle, who believed that historians could only speak of what happened, while novelists spoke of what

¹⁴² Quoted by Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *An Obsession with History: Russian Writers Confront the Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 89.

¹⁴³ Murray Krieger, 'Fiction, History and Empirical Reality', *Critical Enquiry*, 1.2 (December 1974), 335–60 (p. 347).

¹⁴⁴ *Idem*.

could happen.¹⁴⁵ This distinction, which for centuries rendered the historical novel a problematic genre, has been finally undermined or even invalidated by historiographic metafiction that, according to Hutcheon, demonstrates that both history and literature 'derive their force from verisimilitude rather than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalised in their narrative forms'.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, historiography and literature 'appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality'.¹⁴⁷ Hutcheon's view is shared by Waugh who considers history and fiction to be marked by the illusion of verisimilar narrative: while the former can only exist within textual boundaries, real people and events are recontextualised in the act of writing.¹⁴⁸ As for historiography itself, its narrativist conception propagated by White or Ankersmit was championed by two British historians: Herbert Butterfield, who asserted that '[h]istory is reinforced by being written in the story-teller's way',¹⁴⁹ and R. G. Collingwood, for whom historical sensibility manifests itself in the capacity to make a plausible story out of facts that in their unprocessed form make no sense at all.¹⁵⁰ Taking on board the conflation of mythic and historical consciousness and extending to historiography Northrop Frye's comments concerning the archetypal myth-structures underlying literature, White considers historical narratives 'verbal fictions, the contents of which are as *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences'.¹⁵¹ Interestingly, a similar view of history is found in the work of Roland Barthes who notes that we are naturally disinclined to believe a discourse on the past, unless History is presented to us as a myth.¹⁵²

These issues are palpable already in Makine's early texts, such as *Fleuve Amour* that metatextually destabilises the readers' belief in the mimetic character of fiction and asserts the superiority of verisimilitude over veracity. These ideas are communicated through the story of Outkin, a Russian-born writer living in the United States, who produces erotic comics, yet, being

145 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 106.

146 *Ibidem*, p. 105.

147 *Idem*.

148 Waugh, p. 106.

149 Herbert Butterfield, *The Historical Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924).

150 Hayden White, 'Historical Text as a Literary Artefact', in *Tropics of Discourse*, pp. 81–100 (p. 83).

151 *Ibidem*, p. 82.

152 Barthes, p. 135.

physically disabled, has little sexual experience himself. The second-hand material Outkin relies on is provided by Dimitri, whose good looks and consequent luck with women may have earned him the nickname 'Lover', but who in fact dwells in self-imposed celibacy and hence uses his imagination to concoct the erotic tales he sends to his friend across the Atlantic. While metafictionally undermining the autobiographical character of Makine's own prose, Outkin's story questions the value of empirical experience and foregrounds the limited originality of all writing. In addition, the story of the Russian émigré who once aspired to become a politically engaged novelist à la Solzhenitsyn, an author whom, besides, Makine intensely admires,¹⁵³ voices the author's criticism of the West's detrimental effect on a writer's ambitions. Finally, given that Makine and Outkin share their date of birth and Siberian origins, that their surnames have a similar consonance, or that the protagonist's disability may be expressing the author's own perceived outsiderdom,¹⁵⁴ the popular, commercial and necessarily misogynistic character of Outkin's output can be taken for Makine's provocative, facetious or self-deriding comment on the artistic value of his own work. The autobiographical reading aside, Outkin's story undermines the traditional notions of originality, authenticity and presence, while emphasising literature's inevitable intertextuality, as do historiographic metafiction, including, as we will see later, Makine's own novels.

In the Franco-Russian author's more recent works the issues played out by *Fleuve Amour* pertain more specifically to the representation of history, as illustrated by *Le Testament* and *Jacques Dorme*, whose young heroes necessarily rely on textual images of France. Living behind the Iron Curtain and hence possessing little access to reliable and up-to-date sources, let alone a possibility of foreign travel, the two adolescents create their vision of France's culture and history on the basis of a motley collection of dated documents. Among these are press clippings, photographs, Soviet history books, poems and historical novels. There are also oral testimonies, including those belonging to the trans-generational mode of remembering, defined by Marianne Hirsch as postmemory¹⁵⁵ and exemplified by Charlotte Lemonnier's stories belonging

153 See Martin; or Gillespie, 'Bartavels, Ortolans, and Borshch'.

154 According to Claire Sandhal, writers frequently express their own outsiderdom with the trope of disability. Claire Sandhal, 'Considering Disability: Disability Phenomenology's Role in Revolutionising Theatrical Space', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 16.2 (Spring 2012), 17–32 (p. 19).

155 The term relates to Holocaust memories internalised by the survivors' children and grandchildren. Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). The concept of 'postmemory' has been

to her parents' experience. This eclectic and often ideologically-biased selection of sources produces a partial, aberrant and frequently idealistic image of France, yet this is of little consequence as the two protagonists' initial quest for historical exactitude ultimately gives way to their acceptance of a subjective and mythological version of the past. The change in Alyosha's attitude can be instantiated with the story of the tsar's French visit, which the boy's grandmother embellishes and romanticises. Meanwhile, historians reduce the same event to bare facts, which the narrator likens to 'les papillons écartelés sur leurs épingles sous une vitre poussiéreuse' ['butterflies crucified on their pins in a dusty glass case'] (TF, 175). And so instead of a misty day greeting Nicholas II in Cherbourg, or the 'bartavelles et ortolans truffés rôtis' ['roast bartavels and ortolans'] served to the tsar (TF, 46), Alyosha sees 'les pages des livres, les dates en caractères gras. Et la voix se mettait à commenter, à comparer, à citer. Je me sentais atteint d'une étrange cécité ...' ['pages of books, dates in large print. The voice began to comment, to compare, to quote. And I felt myself stricken with a strange blindness ...'] (TF, 169). Moreover, in Charlotte's subjective and mythopoetic account, chronology and continuity of French history are repeatedly distorted, as her tales are triggered by haphazardly chosen evidence. One could therefore say that the protagonist's grandmother emulates White's narrative historian who fills in gaps, suppresses, subordinates, highlights and interprets,¹⁵⁶ or even — to paraphrase Claude Lévi-Strauss — chooses, severs and carves up historical facts.¹⁵⁷ As a result of such off-handedness Alyosha situates the tsar's 1897 visit right after the 1910 floods, believing it to coincide with France's emergence from a natural disaster and with nature's springtime rebirth. This inaccuracy represents what Johann Gustav Droysen considered the historians' 'artistic' activity, in which, as White puts it, they 'constructed an appropriate literary representation of the "realities" thus seen in a prose discourse'.¹⁵⁸ At the same time, illustrating what White calls the moralising function of historical narrativity,¹⁵⁹ by stressing the regenerative powers of imperial Russia's representatives, the discrepancy is likely to be ideologically underpinned.

used in relation to Makine by Stéphanie Bellemare-Page, 'La Littérature au temps de la post-mémoire: Écriture et résilience chez Andreï Makine', *Études littéraires*, 38.1 (2006), 49–56.

156 White, 'Interpretation in History', 281–82.

157 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962), p. 340.

158 White, 'Interpretation in History', p. 284.

159 White, 'The Narrativisation of Real Events', pp. 796–97.

Literature's superiority to historiography is further stressed by the impact of a Victor Hugo poem, 'Sur une barricade', on Alyosha's friend, Pashka. Standing together with grown-up communards in front a firing squad, Hugo's twelve-year old protagonist asks the executioner-in-chief for permission to take his watch to his mother before being shot; then, having been granted escape, the boy dutifully returns to put himself against the wall. However frustrated Pashka may be by the open-endedness of Hugo's story (we never learn whether the boy gets shot), his tears prove the potential of literature to convey the past, while giving credence to Frye's point that to become comprehensive the historian's discourse must become 'mythical in shape, [...] so [that it] approaches the poetic in its structure.'¹⁶⁰ Indeed, the narrator states that 'l'écho de cette histoire en fait si simple, racontée à des milliers de kilomètres du lieu de sa naissance, avait réussi à arracher des larmes à un jeune barbare et le pousser nu dans la neige.' ['the echo of what was, in reality, such a simple story, recounted thousands of kilometres away from the place of its genesis, had succeeded in drawing tears from a young barbarian and driving him naked into the snow.'] (TF, 165) As a result of this and similar experiences, Alyosha abandons a systematic study of history and instead embraces Charlotte's 'impressionistic' history, a choice that will inform his own narrative technique when, once in Paris, he becomes a (historical) novelist.

Similarly, having acted in his youth like an archaeologist painstakingly collecting evidence, *Jacques Dorme's* protagonist-narrator credits his encounter with a dated book collection that has been decimated by fire, with the ability to provide him with a better grasp of France than any history or geography manual. That historiography fails and, as Hutcheon puts it, 'the instincts of the novelist have to take over',¹⁶¹ follows from the protagonist's experience with poetry: a few verses about France's regions give the Russian adolescent a better sense of the Hexagon's geography than any map. By the same token, Lermontov's poem about Napoleon's imagined return from exile articulates the reality of the lapsed emperor's solitude better than any historical study: 'L'exilé revenu sur les côtes bretonnes et lançant des appels à ses maréchaux était une réalité devinée par le poète, plus vraie que l'Histoire elle-même. Plus crédible car belle.' ['The exile returning to the shores of Brittany, sending out his calls to his marshals, was a reality divined by a poet. *More true than History itself. More believable because beautiful.*'] (CTJD, 76, emphasis added) By praising counterfactual conjecture characteristic of the strand of postmodern literature called uchronian fiction, which encourages us to 'enlarge our view of

160 Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), pp. 53–4.

161 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 117.

the past so as to include not only the realised, but also the unrealised plans and dreams',¹⁶² Makine reiterates his belief in the superiority of imagination over facts, and of verisimilitude over veracity. Yet, his choice of Lermontov's poem is hardly politically neutral, as by reinventing Bonaparte as a wretched man and by envisaging his return from exile, the poet solicits his readers' sympathy for the fallen emperor and implicitly condones his autocratic regime that put an end to the First Republic and once again turned France into an imperial power. Considering the post-Soviet vantage point from which Makine writes, this intertextual reference appears to betray the author's nostalgia for his own homeland's superpower status and its omnipotent leaders. At the same time, it sanctions speculative and mythical accounts of the past which, even if they distort historical knowledge, are vindicated by their power to charm or move readers. Furthermore, although Makine himself rarely engages in counterfactual conjecture, his metafictional approval of such a narrative strategy implies his willingness to sacrifice historical accuracy for a mythopoetic portrayal of the Soviet era, which, as I argue throughout this study, his novels indeed offer to his predominantly Western audience.

The Textuality of Knowledge, the Limits of Cognition and the Role of Documents in Historical Inquiry

Whatever their ideological underpinning, the examples examined in the previous section are proof of Makine's acute awareness of the textuality — or rather discursivity — of our (historical) knowledge, which proceeds from our inability to access empirically any reality, whether past or present. In both *Le Testament* and *Jacques Dorme* this discursivity of our conception of the past is concretised as the narrators' inability to experience France directly, which illustrates the very premise of historiographic metafiction. In situating itself in 'the world of texts and intertexts' postmodern literature is indebted,¹⁶³ firstly, to the poststructuralist idea of intertextuality, which, undermining the notions of subjectivity and creativity, situates the text's meaning not in its author's mind but within the history of discourse. Secondly, postmodern literature bears the stamp of contemporary philosophy of history, and notably of the work of White, who states that a historian 'seeks to explain what happened in the past by providing a precise and reliable reconstruction of the events reported in the

¹⁶² Wesseling, p. 149.

¹⁶³ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 125.

documents'.¹⁶⁴ 'For the narrative historian', writes White, 'the historical method consists in the investigation of the documents in order to determine what is the true or most plausible story that can be told about the events of which they are evidence.'¹⁶⁵ Yet, Hutcheon notes that readers of historiographic metafiction must not only be able to recognise the textualised traces of the past and be aware of how these traces have been reworked and reformulated, but also realise 'both the value and the limitations of the inescapably discursive form of [historical] knowledge'.¹⁶⁶ In other words, while postmodern literature can be defined, paraphrasing Foucault's definition of Flaubert's writing,¹⁶⁷ as self-conscious 'art within the archive',¹⁶⁸ the authority of this archive is repeatedly contested by the self-contradictory historiographic metafiction.¹⁶⁹

These theoretical remarks are corroborated by several of Makine's novels, including *Le Testament*, *Olga Arbélina*, *La Femme* or *Une femme aimée*, which all testify to their author's awareness of the inevitable textuality of knowledge, the limits of our understanding of reality, and the unreliability of the documents constituting the basis of this understanding. The first novel to be discussed in this section is *La Femme*, which, set in the 1970s in a remote village near Arkhangelsk, follows a young writer and cynical critic of Brezhnev's Russia. If, officially, the nameless protagonist-narrator travels to Mirnoe to investigate the local wedding and funeral rites, unofficially, he is planning a satire on non-metropolitan Russians' backwardness and moral decrepitude. When conducting field research, the young writer becomes fascinated, both sexually and intellectually, with Vera, a forty-six year old woman who, although thirty years have elapsed since the end of the war, keeps expecting her sweetheart's return from the front. Combined with the heroine's name, which, fittingly, means 'faith' in Russian, Vera's stubborn wait for her beloved intratextually links her to a minor character of *Fleuve Amour*, whereby Makine's ninth novel becomes an example of the inescapable textuality of knowledge that it thematises. There is, however, a considerable difference between the messages conveyed by the two stories: whereas the original Vera's condition merely serves to illustrate one of the war's unspoken repercussions — the staggering number of widows —, *La Femme* is a meditation upon the interplay between

164 White, 'Interpretation in History', p. 282.

165 White, 'The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory', p. 2.

166 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 127.

167 Michel Foucault, 'La Bibliothèque fantastique', in *Travail de Flaubert*, ed. by Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov (Paris: Seuil, 1983), pp. 5–31.

168 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 125.

169 Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 81.

the private and public memory of the Great Fatherland War, as well as upon the role of myths in remembering the dead. Additionally, in the later novel the enigma of Vera's loyalty is what drives the diegesis, while on the metatextual level the protagonist's failure to elucidate the woman's behaviour without capturing it with language communicates our inability to comprehend reality unless previously textualised. The protagonist's vacillating conception of Vera, who incessantly hovers between saintliness and whoredom, suggests in turn the unstable, subjective and equivocal nature of our perception of reality. The young man's repeated and fruitless attempts to pinpoint the woman, which result in mutually contradicting speculations regarding Vera's morality, are metaphorised by the young man's delayed and then ultimately aborted trip to the nearby White Sea. The French name — La Mer Blanche — alludes to Vera's purity and maternal quality, 'la mer' (sea) being phonologically linked to 'la mère' (mother). Having finally embarked on the excursion, the protagonist fails to reach the sea's seemingly ever-receding shores, instead getting lost in a marshy forest where he glimpses but cannot catch up with a running woman, whom he believes to be Vera herself.

To capture the essence of Vera, whose tenacious faithfulness to her lover symbolises some Russians' enduring commitment to the war memory, the young man records his impressions in his diary and years later writes the novel we are reading. Yet, already the first entry, made after his first meeting with Vera and describing her as 'intensément destinée au bonheur' ['palpably meant for happiness'] (FA, 9),¹⁷⁰ quickly loses its currency. Faced by the impossibility of taming reality by reducing it to language, the narrator makes the following self-deriding statement: '[n]ous préférons avoir affaire à une construction verbale plutôt qu'à un vivant ...' ['We would rather deal with a verbal construct than a living person ...'] (FA, 10). The protagonist's subsequent experience with Vera and Mirnoe's other inhabitants, who devotedly nurture folk traditions interlaced with the myth of the local men's wartime sacrifices, shows to the young writer that a human being cannot be stripped naked by words, while no dialectic is capable of capturing life's secrets:

'Abnégation, altruisme ...' À mon insu, le caractère de cette femme provoquait encore dans ma pensée des formules qui tentaient de le cerner. Mais elles échouaient toutes devant la simplicité, très peu réfléchie, avec laquelle Véra agissait.

170 This and all the following translations of quotations from *La Femme qui attendait* come from *The Woman Who Waited*, trans. by Geoffrey Strachan (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2006).

[‘Self-denial, altruism...’ Subconsciously, this woman’s character still provoked phrases in my mind that were attempts to define it. But they all failed in the face of the impulsive simplicity with which Vera acted.]

FA, 120–1

Reality’s inherently changing and ungraspable nature is illustrated, for example, by the protagonist’s failure to recognise Vera on their second meeting or by the fact that he mistakes her for a copulating couple, the fragments he registered — the white gleam of a thigh, the curve of a torso straining with effort, the breathless panting — producing an erroneous perception of reality. The modification of the young man’s perception of Vera, which occurs between the first and the second meeting, is, appropriately, paralleled by a sudden change of weather, as well as by references to the whiteness of freshly fallen snow, to the sky’s milky pallor, to the paleness of Vera’s neck and chest, and, finally, to the proximity of the White Sea. All these details clearly reflect the protagonist’s assimilation of the enigmatic woman with innocence and motherhood, while betraying his inability to think of her outside the categories of language. This time, however, the narrator inscribes Vera into the simplistic opposition between whoredom and virginity.

La Femme thus confirms Wesseling’s contention that a plot must be imposed on a plotless reality so that this reality may become accessible,¹⁷¹ a contention shared by contemporary philosophy of history. Notably, White believes that ‘to *historicise* any structure, to write its history, is to mythologise it’¹⁷² and that this impulse to mythologise must be located ‘in the very nature of language itself.’¹⁷³ Judging myths superior to facts, Makine’s narrator opines that despite the absence of evidence that it was the sacrifice of Mirmoe’s men that stopped the Germans from closing the ring around Leningrad, the local women’s faith in this *fact* endows it with the value of historical truth. Moreover, the myth’s power to help these war widows to handle their loss and to invest their lonely and bleak lives with meaning, justifies its further promulgation and should preclude any attempts to debunk it. Following the same logic, it matters little that Vera’s sweetheart is alive and that, as a bemedalled veteran benevolently stroking his grandchildren’s heads, has become a living monument to the official image of the Great Victory, for the woman’s loyalty to him has given sense and purpose to her life. Thus, although the novel sets out to contrast the state-sponsored cult of the war, embodied by the likes of Vera’s corrupt former

171 Wesseling, p. 120.

172 White, ‘Historicism, History, and the Figurative Imagination’, p. 51.

173 *Ibidem*, p. 52.

sweetheart, with the individual Russians' commitment to honouring the war dead, incarnated by the women of Mirnoe, the two prove inseparable as private memories have been contaminated by the official discourse on the war. In this light, sentences such as ' "Les défenseurs de Leningrad ont obéi à l'ordre de Staline de résister jusqu'à la dernière goutte de sang" ' ["The defenders of Leningrad obeyed Stalin's order to resist down to the last drop of their blood"] (FA, 124), read by the protagonist in a child's copy book, must not, according to the narrator, be dismissed as propaganda, since they provide the survivors and their descendants with pride in their country's pivotal role in defeating fascism.

The overall message of *La Femme* is that a narrative framework must be imposed on a reality so that this reality may be grasped and conveyed, a process that requires events to be mythologised, which in turn may mean a departure from documented facts. Historical exactitude is, however, once again shown to be less important than the power of myth that can help people make sense of their loss, structure their shattered lives and give them hope for the future. More specifically, the protagonist's visit to Mirnoe and his encounter with Vera have a profoundly transformative effect on him, as they undercut his cynicism about Soviet people whom he once considered morally degenerate and passively complicit in the oppressive power structures, a combination encapsulated by Alexander Zinovev's derogatory term *homo sovieticus*.¹⁷⁴ Additionally, his stay in Mirnoe teaches the young man, who, prior to his trip belonged to a circle of dissidents critical of the regime, infatuated with the West, and in pursuit of carnal pleasures, to appreciate inherently Russian ideals, such as communality, solidarity, self-denial, humility and blind obedience to authority. The positive valorisation of the protagonist's *Bildung* is confirmed by the dissipation of his erstwhile intellectual circle: while some have ended up in a *gulag*, others have been forced into exile. Yet, as evidenced by the already-mentioned accident suffered by Arkady's daughter, emigration is hardly a desirable option. Crucially, as part of his newly found wisdom, the young Leningrader learns to respect the legacy of the Great Fatherland War, which he now realises goes beyond the state-forged cult, and conveys personal loss and pride in Russia's heroic feat. Signalled by his progressive identification with the war generation, the protagonist's metamorphosis is ultimately sealed by his cathartic sexual act with Vera, through which he displaces the woman's missing sweetheart.

174 For an analysis of the term coined by Zinovev, see Stanisław Barańczak, 'From Russia with Love', *Breathing under Water and Other East European Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 16–21.

To conclude my analysis of *La Femme*, like several of Makine's other novels such as *Confession*, *Jacques Dorme* or *L'Homme inconnu*, the story of the young Leningrader links traditional Russian values to the memory of the Great Fatherland War, representing the latter as the utmost expression of Russian national spirit. This association is reinforced by Mirnoe's name, which alludes to the pre-1920s self-governing peasant commune called *mir* and designed to 'hel[p] the sick and old, g[ive] mutual aid to the needy, t[ake] care of all its members, and provi[de] a warm and supportive atmosphere'.¹⁷⁵ In a novel written from the post-1991 perspective, the village becomes a pocket of communist utopia where people selflessly help each other and where the past is celebrated, even if it is in the form of myth. Consequently, although *La Femme* presents itself as a postmodern meditation on the impossibility of empirical knowledge and as a celebration of plurality, uncertainty, subjectivity, hesitation and private experience as opposed to impersonal and ideologically-charged historiographies, it becomes an apology of a totalising narrative. And by reviving and celebrating the myth of the Great Fatherland War, the novel, correlatedly, hails an oppressive political entity that was the Soviet Union.

That 'the basis for empirical facts is', as Paul de Man has it, 'but written texts, even if these texts masquerade in the guise of wars and revolutions',¹⁷⁶ is illustrated also by *Olga Arbélina*, a novel set between 1946 and 1947 in the fictional French town Villiers-la-Forêt and staging a Russian princess working as a librarian for the community of fellow émigrés. Although the Nuremberg trials of Nazi criminals or the invention of the plutonium bomb happen in her lifetime, Olga can only access these and other contemporaneous events in their pre-textualised and pre-interpreted form. Makine thus both reiterates that reality remains beyond our empirical grasp and makes a point about the impossibility of objectivity and neutrality of historical accounts, whereby he implicitly endorses White's conviction that 'all historical narratives contain an irreducible and inexpungeable element of interpretation'.¹⁷⁷ The newspaper reports Olga reads are intent on — and indeed succeed in — manipulating their readers by, for example, suggesting the potential of Nuremberg to draw a line under the tragic chapter in history that was World War II. Olga, however, does not subscribe to this, in her view, simplistic conception of history. She senses that the executions will only further perpetuate violence, rather than ensure enduring peace, a suspicion confirmed by the news concerning the development of the

175 Daniel, p. 74. The *mir* was disbanded in 1929 by Stalin.

176 Paul de Man, 'Literary History and Literary Modernity', *Dedalus*, 99.2 (Spring 1970), 384–404 (p. 404).

177 White, 'Interpretation in History', p. 281.

plutonium bomb. Furthermore, Olga appears to judge the death penalty given to the Nazi criminals excessive, as can be inferred from her comment about the enormous size of the noose used for the hangings. Finally, guilt-ridden herself, she pities and identifies with the convicts as her attention focuses on their shut eyes, a detail that ties in with the novel's running tropes of Oedipal blindness and responsibility for crimes of which one is not — or does not wish to be — fully aware. Consequently, if with Olga's overall stance towards Nuremberg Makine supports White's belief that "[p]ure" interpretation, the disinterested inquiry into anything whatsoever, is unthinkable as an ideal' and that '[t]he purity of any interpretation can be measured only by the extent to which it succeeds in repressing any impulse to appeal to political authority',¹⁷⁸ he also scores a political goal, characteristically stressing his compatriots' pacifism and capacity for forgiveness.

Olga's story fleshes out not only the textuality of knowledge but also Makine's concern about the unreliability of sources, such as the press articles the princess reads or the photographs used to validate the information provided in a textual form. However interesting it would be to analyse the snapshots Olga takes of herself with a self-release camera, the humorous pictures coming out of her friend's photographic studio, or the afore-mentioned images of the dead Nazi criminals, I will limit my discussion to a single example: the picture of Count Khodorsky's estate which becomes instrumental in the émigré's suicide. To finance his lavish Parisian lifestyle, the count sells to naïve French buyers title-deeds to properties nationalised by the Bolsheviks and, as the last resort, parts with the house where he spent his childhood. To convince a suspicious purchaser, Khodorsky produces a photograph of himself as a young boy standing in front of the country house and holding a wisp of hay to a horse. The image is thus used here in its traditional evidentiary role (*'ça a été'* [*'this-has-been'*]) and confirms photography's morbid connotations, both postulated by Barthes.¹⁷⁹ However, while Khodorsky's ensuing suicide unquestionably corroborates Barthes's conception of photography as a token of death, it challenges the trustworthiness of visual as well as verbal (Khodorsky's word) and written (title-deed) evidence. Having said that, by representing the count's suicide as resulting from the virtual sale and stating that *'[c]'est le cliché qui sembla jouer le rôle décisif'* [*'it was the snapshot that seemed to be the deciding*

178 White, 'The Politics of Historical Interpretation', p. 114. For a more detailed analysis of the novel, see Helena Duffy, 'In Search of Carnavalesque Anomie: The Disavowal of the Liberation in Andreï Makine's *The Crime of Olga Arbyelina*', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 8.3 (August 2015), 240–53.

179 Barthes, p. 124.

factor'] (*COA*, 17),¹⁸⁰ Makine reinstates photography in its basic function, restoring its power not so much to substantiate as to *create* a narrative.

By showing documents to be equivocal or simply fallacious Makine joins postmodern historians and historical novelists in their incredulity towards the traces of the past that, for centuries, were the principal support of history writing. The questioning of what Wesseling calls 'faithful adherence to the external authority of the sources as a criterion for historical truth'¹⁸¹ began already in the nineteenth century when thinkers such as Leopold von Ranke claimed that documents should be purified of misconceptions and mistakes before serving as evidence.¹⁸² Likewise, Collingwood rejected the unquestionable authority of sources, arguing that historians must put documents in the witness box and question them according to a set of clearly defined principles.¹⁸³ Finally, Theodor Lessing did not believe remnants of the past to be entirely reliable since they are a product of human beings who perceived the world in terms of their own desires and preconceptions.¹⁸⁴ More recently these issues have been taken up by Foucault who situates the document at the heart of the difference between traditional historical studies and what he calls 'archaeology of knowledge', downgrading it from an eloquent source of information to a silent entity. This is because today's historians no longer strive to interpret documents, to prove their veracity or to judge their value, treating the document as 'cette matière inerte à travers laquelle [l'histoire] essaie de reconstituer ce que les hommes ont fait ou dit' [an inert material through which [history] tries to reconstitute what men have done or said'].¹⁸⁵ For Foucault, such a conception of documents has a considerable and manifold impact on our understanding of the historical process, as exemplified by the incorporation into the methodological field of history of problems associated with the retrieval of the past, such as the building-up of a corpus of documents, the establishment of the principle of choice, or the specification of the level and method of analysis.¹⁸⁶

180 This and all the following translations of quotations from *Le Crime d'Olga Arbélina* come from *The Crime of Olga Arbyelina*, trans. by Geoffrey Strachan (New York: Arcade, 1999).

181 Wesseling, p. 72.

182 *Ibidem*, p. 123.

183 W. J. van der Dussen, *History as a Science: The Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood* (New York: Springer, 1981), pp. 139–41.

184 Wesseling, p. 123.

185 Michel Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 14. This and all the following translations of quotations from *L'Archéologie du savoir* come from *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2002).

186 *Ibidem*, p. 14.

As Foucault's heirs, many contemporary novelists, including Makine himself, question the very possibility of applying hermeneutics to documentary evidence, the stability of the inferred meaning and historical materials' trustworthiness, and suggest that sources are as much tinged by fiction as retrospective accounts themselves. Moreover, fitting in with the self-contradictory character of historiographic metafiction postulated by Hutcheon, the work of today's historical novelists both stresses the importance of documents in historical inquiry and manifestly flaunts their insufficiency, incompleteness or political bias. Yet, unlike the postmodern novel that is paradoxical in conservatively installing and then challenging conventions, Makine's prose, as exemplified by Khodorsky's photo, inscribes, subverts and then *reinscribes* the importance of documents in historical inquiry, as it demonstrates our total dependence on remnants of the past to make sense of history. This process is perhaps best illustrated by *Le Testament* where the textualised knowledge of France is symbolised by Charlotte's 'Siberian suitcase' filled with French newspaper clippings from la Belle Époque. The fact that Charlotte and, earlier, her mother carried the cumbersome piece of luggage across Europe and then around Russia, communicates, firstly, their (subconscious) urge to preserve their country's history and with it their own national identity, and, secondly, their unshakeable faith in the importance of documentary evidence in the reconstruction of the past.¹⁸⁷ Soon, however, the press cuttings reveal their limited evidentiary value, which transpires from their comparison to silver coins coloured by the patina of centuries, while the suitcase itself is likened to a treasure chest. These two similes imply that Charlotte emplots, to borrow White's term,¹⁸⁸ French history as an adventure story or as a history of an extinct civilisation, which undermines the historical accuracy of her discourse. Yet, in the face of the absence of other sources, the novel's protagonist-narrator himself will eventually resort to the same disorderly collection of press clippings in order to enrich and validate his mythical image of France as a land of civil liberties and erotic and gastronomic savoir-faire, and, as one critic put it, as 'a domain of freedom and multiplicity'.¹⁸⁹

Historical sources occupy a similarly ambiguous position in Makine's penultimate novel, *Une femme aimée*, whose central character, a young

187 Cf. Hélène Mélat, 'Testament français ou testament russe?', *La Revue russe*, 21 (2002), 41–9 (p. 42).

188 Hayden White, 'Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth', in *The History and Narrative Reader*, ed. by Geoffrey Roberts (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 375–89.

189 Sharon Lubkemann Allen, 'Makine's Testament: Transposition, Translation, Translingualism, and the Transformation of the Novel', *RILUnE*, 4 (2006), 167–86 (p. 169).

cinematographer, is writing a screenplay about Catherine the Great. At first, Oleg is determined to adhere to the ideals of objectivity, disinterestedness and historical truth, as corroborated by documents, thus hoping to construct a rigorously historical portrait of the empress: 'Il a tout lu, annoté, il connaît la vie de l'impératrice mieux [...] qu'il ne connaît sa propre vie!' ['He has read and made notes on everything. He knows the empress's life better than [...] his own!'] (*UFA*, 14)¹⁹⁰ Eager to separate facts from non-documented anecdotes, Oleg promises his girlfriend that 'toutes les réalités historiques seront respectées, même l'ampleur des crinolines ...' ['All the historical details will be accurate, down to the width of the crinolines ...'] (*UFA*, 21) His faith in recorded history is materialised by the itinerary of Catherine's rule suspended over Oleg's bed, which, while allowing Makine to relate succinctly the basic facts about the empress, represents a supposedly non-narrativised and therefore theoretically objective account of the past such as found in medieval annals. Such history is, in White's view, 'eminently rational' and 'rather prudent in its desire to record only those events about which there could be little doubt as to their occurrence [...] and not to interpellate facts on speculative grounds or to advance arguments about how the events are really connected to one another.'¹⁹¹ However, Oleg's chronicle of Catherine's life is hardly impartial as it underscores the tsarina's achievements to the detriment of the less glorious chapters of her life: '[v]illes bâties' [[t]owns built', '[v]ictoires remportées' ['[v]ictories won'], '[é]dits pour soulager le peuple' ['[d]ecrees for the benefit of the people'] (*UFA*, 33). By the same token, the empress's marital infidelity, hunger for power, and ruthlessness are excused by her husband's impotence:

1745–1753 — L'Époux se montre peu enclin aux rapports charnels. Catherine en profite pour s'instruire, observer les rouages du pouvoir ... Et nouer ses premières liaisons amoureuses. Pierre est opéré de sa malformation génitale.

[1745–1753 — Her husband shows little inclination to consummate the marriage. Catherine takes this opportunity to educate herself and study the machinery of power ... And to embark on her first love affairs. Peter is operated on for his genital malformation.]

UFA, 34

190 This and all the following translations of quotations from *Une femme aimée* come from *A Woman Loved*, trans. by Geoffrey Strachan (London: MacLehose Press, 2015).

191 Hayden White, *The Content and the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 9.

The itinerary's political bias aside, Oleg's historical scrupulousness is soon undermined by — paradoxically — a fastidious historian. Since errors have been deeply embedded in historical consciousness, it may be advisable, in Luria's mind, to keep portraying Catherine the way we are accustomed to see her: 'une nymphomane [qui] attirait dans son lit tous les officiers de la garde, une jalouse qui fait emmurer une servante, une vindicative qui envoie ses soldats violer une rivale.' ['a nymphomaniac who attracts all the officers of her guard to her bed, a jealous woman who does have a serving maid walled in, a vindictive woman who sends her soldiers to rape a rival.'] (*UFA*, 110) According to Luria, though historically inaccurate, such a representation is plausible, a point of view invoking White's position that it is by narrativising the past that we accept it as true,¹⁹² or Foucault's similarly ironic conception of history as '[une] sorte d'erreur qui a pour elle de ne pouvoir être réfutée, sans doute parce que la longue cuisson de l'histoire l'a rendue inaltérable.' ['the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it was hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history.']¹⁹³ Equally surprisingly, Luria applauds the plurality of interpretations of the same historical fact and condones Oleg's creative licence since, he stresses, what the cinematographer produces is fiction, *not* history. Such a cavalier approach to history writing is contextualised by Luria's experience of living in a country where the past has been constantly reworked and where, consequently, the events' meaning can never be fixed, while the historical personages' motives cannot be univocally explained. For example, while Luria's conception of the October Revolution as a liberating moment has been shaken by posterior developments, he can but conjecture about what the origins of the Seven Years' War or about Stalin's reasons for sentencing millions to death.

Returning to Oleg's representation of Catherine's reign, Erdmann soon realises that, to borrow Siegfried Krakauer's formulation, 'the historian's quest and history on the screen are at cross-purposes.'¹⁹⁴ Signified by his decision to sell off his books on the Catherinian age, Oleg's rejection of the authority of sources coincides with his choice to depict the German-born princess in a way that has not been recorded by historians: 'Ce qu'elle a véritablement vécu. [...] Il devait y avoir dans sa vie des instants qui la rendaient à elle même.' ['What her life really was. [...] There must have been times in her life that allowed her to be herself.'] (*UFA*, 59) For instance, Erdmann tries to imagine

192 Hayden White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', *Critical Inquiry*, 7.1 (Autumn 1980), 5–27 (p. 24).

193 Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Généalogie, Histoire', p. 398.

194 Krakauer, p. 80.

what the empress was doing between negotiating with Gustav III of Sweden and waging a war in the Caspian region, or repeatedly visualises her strolling by the sea, watching snow falling. Oleg's approach can be once again related to the Whitean distinction between non-narrative and narrative history, where in the former it is 'the forces of disorder, natural and human, the forces of violence and destruction' that occupy the forefront of attention,¹⁹⁵ whereas periods of security and human happiness become 'blank pages in history'.¹⁹⁶ Governed by an obsession with continuity, coherence and fullness, and terrified of emptiness and 'haunted by nightmares about the destructive power of time', narrative history, in contrast, strives to fill in these blanks.¹⁹⁷ Thus, like White's narrative historian or the Foucauldian genealogist, Erdmann studies those elements of Catherine's life that are seen as being without history — 'les sentiments, l'amour, la conscience, les instincts' ['sentiments, love, conscience, instincts']¹⁹⁸ —, and captures the moments from which events are absent.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, by fantasising about Catherine's secret trip to Italy with her much younger lover, Alexander Lanskoj, Oleg inscribes his project into the current of alternate or counterfactual history, which, to quote Simon Malpas, 'gestures towards the idea that history is about a set of individual, personal choices' and which 'interrogate[s] the factuality of the past in order to challenge assumptions'.²⁰⁰ Importantly, according to Malpas, the 'What if? novel' only formally enshrines what historical literature does anyway to some degree, flagging 'the liberties that [it] takes with the historical record by more obviously asking the readers to forget what they know'.²⁰¹ However, unlike authors of counterfactual histories who adopt either an unhistorical or 'forensic and evidentiary' approach by using invented documents,²⁰² Oleg supports his speculations with real historical sources. These include the evidence of Lanskoj learning Italian and amassing money in the currencies of the countries through which the lovers were to travel, or Catherine's maps that, when joined together, indicate the couple's prospective itinerary. As a result, like historiographic metafiction that 'radically questions the nature of the archive, the

195 White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 10.

196 *Ibidem*, p. 11.

197 *Idem*.

198 Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Généalogie, Histoire', p. 393.

199 *Idem*.

200 Malpas, p. 173.

201 *Idem*.

202 *Ibidem*, p. 172.

document, evidence'²⁰³ and 'complicates both the denial and the assertion of reference',²⁰⁴ *Une femme aimée* asserts and undermines the position of sources in historical inquiry. Yet, Makine's novel once again does so in a reversed order, first dismissing and then ultimately confirming the conventional role of evidentiary material.

Ironically, the least trustworthy of all the types of sources featured in Makine's oeuvre are photographs whose traditional function is to authenticate the represented reality,²⁰⁵ and which have therefore been habitually used as keystones of historical explanation.²⁰⁶ Stephen Bull dates the tradition of using photographs as concrete proof back to 1844 when William Henry Fox Talbot 'enthusiastically promoted the usefulness of the photograph as document.'²⁰⁷ Likewise, Susan Sontag invokes the use of photographic evidence by Paris police in the roundup of Communards in 1871, before stating that the photograph 'passes for inconvertible proof that a given thing happened. The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture.'²⁰⁸ Finally, Barthes famously contrasts the inability of language, which is, by nature, fictive, to validate itself with the authenticating role of photography:

Devant une photo, la conscience [...] prend [...] la voie de la certitude: l'essence de la Photographie est de ratifier ce qu'elle représente. [...] [La photographie] n'invente pas; elle est l'authentification même. [...] [E]lle ne ment jamais. [...] Toute photographie est un certificat de présence.

[In front of a photograph, our consciousness [...] take[s] [...] the path of certainty: the Photograph's essence is to ratify what it represents. [Photography] does not invent; it is authentication itself. [...] Photography never lies [...]. Every photograph is a certificate of presence.]²⁰⁹

203 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 149.

204 *Ibidem*, p. 146.

205 Barthes, p. 165.

206 Jennifer Tucker and Tina Campt, 'Entwined Practices: Engagements with Photography in Historical Enquiry', *History and Theory*, 48 (December 2009), 1–8 (p. 2). Tucker invokes the British social historian, Raphael Samuel, who in 1994 made a case for the value of photography for historians wanting to study a new kind of past (p. 3).

207 Talbot did so by taking pictures of items in his art collection to prove that, in case they should be stolen, they *had been* in his possession. Stephen Bull, *Photography* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 101.

208 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Rosettabooks, 2005), p. 3.

209 Barthes, pp. 133–34.

Thanks to photography, continues Barthes, 'le passé est désormais aussi sûr que le présent, ce qu'on voit sur le papier est aussi sûr que ce qu'on touche.' ['henceforth the past is as certain as the present, what we see on paper is as certain as what we touch.']*²¹⁰

The conception of photography's evidentiary potential somewhat changes with the onset of postmodernism, as exemplified by White's view that we ought to treat imagistic evidence as a complement of verbal evidence rather than as discourse in its own right. This opinion is shared by Sontag, who contends that despite the presumption of its veracity, photography occupies a shady position 'between art and truth': '[e]ven when photographers are most concerned with mirroring reality, they are still haunted by tacit imperatives of taste and conscience.'²¹¹ And, since any photograph has multiple meanings,²¹² its value as information is of the same order as fiction.²¹³ Finally, like Sontag who states that photographs, 'which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy' and that, consequently, we need a narrative to make us comprehend the photo's message,²¹⁴ Bill Nichols considers visual images mute objects whose meaning 'may be profoundly imprecise, ambiguous, even deceiving.'²¹⁵ To these comments it is worth adding Hutcheon's remark that photography 'both plays and subverts its presumed naturalness and transparency, and does so for political reasons.'²¹⁶ For the Canadian critic, photography is therefore the perfect postmodern vehicle: the self-contradiction at the heart of the photographic medium — the camera holder's subjectivity is difficult to reconcile with the objectivity of camera technology — neatly corresponds to the paradoxes inherent in postmodernism.²¹⁷

In Makine's prose photography's ambiguity amplifies that of other historical sources, as its authority is established, contested and then re-established. Excellent examples of this mechanism come from not only *Olga Arbélina* but also *Le Testament* and *Requiem*, where photography's traditional value is discredited before being reinstated. In Makine's award-winning novel, Charlotte authenticates her deceptive discourse about Alyosha's origins with

²¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 135.

²¹¹ Sontag, p. 4.

²¹² *Ibidem*, p. 18.

²¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

²¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

²¹⁵ Bill Nichols, *Ideology and Image: Social Representations in the Cinema and Other Media* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 57.

²¹⁶ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 121.

²¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 120–1.

a family album showing elegant French people in glamorous settings. The authority of these images is then overthrown when Charlotte posthumously reveals Alyosha's true lineage and, ironically, substantiates her revelation with a snapshot of a Russian woman holding a baby, thus restoring to the photographic medium its original role. This scenario is echoed by *Requiem* where images are often used to confirm false identities. Freshly recruited by the KGB, the protagonist receives a forged passport featuring his own photo, and later he and his fellow spy will be equipped with an expertly fabricated family album documenting their present identity. The protagonist-narrator imagines that, if found by strangers, the craftily contrived album would be likely to move those looking at it to tears. The description of the counterfeit album as 'plus convaincant que la légende la mieux élaborée' ['more convincing than the most carefully concocted life story'] communicates Makine's belief that (hi)story does not have to be true as long as it is plausible, well narrated and poignant (*RE*, 72). Yet another example of photography's fallacy is the image of Shakh, the protagonist's mentor within the KGB, which is published posthumously in a newspaper as a photo of "[l]'un des barons de la filère nucléaire." ['[o]ne of the barons of the nuclear network.']. (*RE*, 278) The narrator is affronted by the caption that makes a mockery of Shakh's unswerving loyalty towards his homeland; having fought in the battle of Kursk, he continued to spy after the USSR's breakup, his mission consisting in preventing the new Russian elites from selling military secrets to the West. Paradoxically, the only *truthful* image whose authority is never questioned in the novel, is the photograph that the protagonist and his lover take when they test their new camera by pointing its lens down at the snow-covered ground. The non-referentiality of this picture is, however, only apparent as the shadows of two people and of a broken-down fence captured on camera convey the couple's spectral existence as secret agents and anticipate the disintegration of the Soviet Union's seemingly impenetrable borders. The photo's evidentiary potential and association with death are confirmed when it is presented to the protagonist-narrator as an undeniable *proof* of his lover's demise at the hands of the CIA. Hence, like the snapshot of Alyosha's biological mother revealed at the end of *Le Testament*, the 'test photo' re-establishes photography in its traditional function.

To conclude this section, if Makine's doubt in documents' role in the reconstruction of the past is typically postmodern, his special interest in photography is telling, as Hutcheon considers it as a medium that both exposes the fiction of selfhood²¹⁸ and inscribes the authority of realistic representa-

218 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 159.

tion while ironically contradicting it. Moreover, the Canadian theorist likens photography to historiographic metafiction itself, the two being a locus of postmodern paradoxes: at the time when we constantly take and consume images, photography has risen to the form of art.²¹⁹ Yet, Makine's representation of photographs as an unreliable yet inexorable source of information about the past may also mean that the author is nostalgically harking back to the documentary status of photos and other traces of the past, just as he manifests a restorative impulse in relation to the Soviet metanarrative and, as we will now see again, to the Soviet Union itself.

'The Presence of the Past'

The title of this chapter's final section has been borrowed from the already-mentioned Venice Biennale that by providing a platform for 'La Strada Novissima', institutionally recognised postmodernism. The self-proclaimed newness of Portoghesi's twenty facades lay precisely in their historical parody since, in the architect's own words, 'the past whose presence we claim is not a golden age to be recuperated.'²²⁰ Rather, as Hutcheon explains, the postmodern artist's relationship with the past consists in a critical revising and an ironic dialogue with it from the present perspective.²²¹ Yet, as often, postmodernism only renders visible a practice that is not new, since historians have always narrated the past from the present point of view, selecting, as Wesseling notes, 'only those facts from the wealth of data [...] that they deem relevant to the question they put to the past.'²²² Already signalled by Hans-Georg Gadamer's declaration that 'history must be written anew by every new present',²²³ this 'presentism' of history became first explicitly stated when, during the first half of the twentieth century, the American 'new historians' claimed that the only aspects of the past worth studying are those relevant to the present.²²⁴ Their position finds reflection in Collingwood's and Benedetto Croce's 'perspectivist'

219 *Ibidem*, p. 228.

220 Paolo Portoghesi, *The Postmodern: The Architecture of the Postindustrial Society* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983), p. 26. Quoted by Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 4.

221 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 4.

222 Wesseling, p. 71.

223 *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, ed. by Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), p. 24.

224 Here Wesseling quotes the names of Herbert B. Addams, J. H. Robinson, Carl Becker and Charles Beard. Wesseling, p. 71.

view of history, which meant that 'our versions of history are necessarily determined by the interests of the present':²²⁵ 'Every present', writes Collingwood, 'has a past of its own, and any imaginative reconstruction of the past aims at reconstructing the past of this present, the present in which the act of imagination is going on as here and now perceived.'²²⁶ The 'present-ification' of history, to use Ihab Hassan's term,²²⁷ has also been emphasised by White who, inspired by Droysen, notes that the past can be known insofar as it exists in the present, and can do so in two ways: through remains such as documents and monuments, and 'as elements of social praxis inherited from the past in the form of conventions, ideas, institutions, beliefs, and so on.'²²⁸ Thus envisaged, concludes White, 'every putative representation of the past is and can only be a meditation on that part of the present that is really either a trace or a sublimation of some part of the past.'²²⁹

Like in contemporary philosophy of history, in postmodern art the influence of the present on our conception of history is one of the key concerns. Postmodern literature self-consciously locates itself on '[t]he border between past events and present praxis'²³⁰ and 'critically confronts the past with the present' and '[i]n reaction against the tendency of our times to value only the new and the novel, [...] returns us to the re-thought past to see what [...] is of value in that past experience.'²³¹ Naturally, historiographic metafiction is self-consciously aware of narrating the past in the present, of the present contaminating the past, and of being simultaneously historical and contemporary:

The past did exist — independently of our capacity to know it. Historiographic metafiction accepts this philosophically realist view of the past and then proceeds to confront it with an anti-realist one that suggests that [...] the past exists *for us* — *now* — only as traces on and in the present.²³²

225 *Idem.*

226 R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 247.

227 Ihab Hassan, 'Ideas of Cultural Change', in *Innovation/Renovation: New Perspectives on the Humanities*, ed. by Ihab Hassan and Sally Hassan (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), pp. 15–38. Quoted by Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 20.

228 White, *The Content and the Form*, p. 91.

229 *Idem.*

230 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 146.

231 *Ibidem*, p. 39.

232 Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 73.

Yet, according to Hutcheon, this is a two-way process: 'the past and the present are judged in each other's light',²³³ or, as Wesseling puts it, the present prays on the past and vice versa.²³⁴

In historiographic metafiction the critical link between the past and the present is exposed by the use of not only documents but also multiple narrative frames that, connecting two or more temporalities, stress that history is but a verbal construct while showing its relevance for the here and now. Such a multi-layered narrative distinguishes postmodern historical literature from its classical form with its omniscient and invisible narrator relating events without disclosing the vantage point of her/his inquiry. Such a narrative technique, explains Wesseling, 'expound[s] the idea that history is not an object "out there" which can be recovered in its totality, but a projection of the historian's consciousness' and that history can be subject to multifarious interpretations.²³⁵ As for Makine's oeuvre, all the novels, except *La Fille*, offer the additional narrative level that, situated in the present, provides the scene for a commentary upon the act of retrieving the past and/or upon the production of its cultural representations. And, as is usually the case in postmodern novels whose narrators are driven in their quest by self-interested motives, including political ones,²³⁶ Makine's fiction emphasises the intimate relationship between the protagonist-narrator's personal situation and his historical research. Because the overwhelming majority of the Franco-Russian author's central characters are orphans and exiles, their quest is usually motivated by a search for parental figures and, more generally, for their origins and a sense of selfhood. Such a scenario indeed supports Friedrich Nietzsche's perception of our interest in history as an effort to provide ourselves with an identity.²³⁷ Likewise, it illustrates Theodor Lessing's position that 'historical knowledge is shaped by certain basic emotional needs, and that historiography above all satisfies the need for an identity'.²³⁸

Before paying full attention to Makinean narrators' nostalgia-driven quest for their origins in Chapters 3 and 5, I will now briefly examine how the postmodern ideas about the interconnection between the past and the present are played out in *Olga Arbélina* and *Une femme aimée*. The earlier novel possesses three narrative levels, one of which is situated in the present, where a

233 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 39.

234 Wesseling, p. 137.

235 *Ibidem*, p. 85.

236 *Ibidem*, p. 121.

237 *Ibidem*, p. 107.

238 *Ibidem*, p. 120.

penniless and quasi-homeless Russian exile haunts a cemetery searching for material for his novels. There he learns about a Russian princess who, suspected of murdering her fellow émigré, finished her days in a mental asylum. He then imaginatively joins in the detective frenzy that some fifty years earlier seized the inhabitants of Villiers-la-Forêt where Olga's tragedy had unravelled. The novel's second chapter, which retraces the criminal investigation following the Russian doctor's drowning, can be read as a metatextual comment on the enterprise of storytelling and the tension between veracity and verisimilitude that it engages. The narrator's observation that everyone wanted Golets's death to be a crime of passion alludes to the readers' horizon of expectations which a writer may or may not wish to meet, and which in the case of the doctor's demise is frustrated when reality fails to offer a plausible plot: 'Dans un livre, [...] tout se serait résolu beaucoup bien plus vite.' ['In a book [...] everything would have been resolved more quickly.'] (*COA*, 28) As for the evidence on which a historical novel — just as a criminal verdict — is based, its value is ridiculed when the only eyewitness turns out to be a simpleton with a stammer. Further, the objects the police recover in Golets's house not only throw no light upon the man's drowning, but give rise to an absurd confusion between a collection of bow-ties (*nœuds papillon*) and a collection of butterflies (*papillons*) that, if familiar with Nabokov's entomological passion, a French person would expect a Russian exile to possess. Impossible to solve, the mystery of Golets's death opens itself up to countless conjectures, the French and the Russian inhabitants of Villiers producing diverging interpretations of the event.

To put an end to these speculations, the narrator himself becomes an investigator. In doing so, he discovers that Olga, who was the main suspect during the inquest into Golets's murder, was indeed guilty, but not of killing her unwelcome suitor (though she may have secretly wished him dead), but of having a sexual relationship with her teenage son. However, the narrator quickly excuses the princess, repositing her deed as an act of self-sacrifice for the sake of her mortally-ill child, and therefore as the utmost expression of maternal love. By retelling the Oedipus myth to the effect of absolving the culprit and of adopting the mother's rather than the son's perspective, *Olga Arbélina* aligns itself with postmodern fiction, as exemplified by J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* or the imaginary novel featured in Coetzee's more recent work of fiction, *Elizabeth Costello*. While *Foe* shifts emphasis from Robinson Crusoe to Susan Barton, the female castaway on Crusoe's island, *The House on Eccles Street* refocuses on Leopold Bloom's wife, Molly. Also, like historiographic metafiction, Makine's fifth novel borrows from and subverts the conventions of the detective story, which is considered by Wesseling 'an epistemological genre par excellence' and a genre that is 'particularly effective for representing problems about the

inaccessibility of the past.²³⁹ Finally, typically for historiographic metafiction, rather than by curiosity, the narrator is motivated by the relevance of the past to his own present situation. By investigating the story of a Russian exile who, like himself, was at odds with French society and was unable to return to her homeland, which had been eclipsed by a new socio-political order, the narrator may be hoping to deal with his own liminality. To narrow the gap between himself and the woman he is writing about, the narrator rejects testimonies and material evidence, and instead relies on his imagination to retrace the months leading up to Golets's death. Thus reinvented, the princess's story has the potential to comfort a vulnerable man whose fascination with cemeteries intimates his own fear of (artistic) death. That these are indeed the narrator's motives can be inferred from the parallels between the homeless Russian and his heroine; like the former, who seeks comfort and self-justification in the past, Olga re-examines her youth in revolutionary Russia. And, just as the narrator's efforts to reconstitute Olga's life can be read as his attempt to gain a mastery over his exilic predicament, the princess strives to rationalise and defend her forbidden relationship by locating its origins in the carnivalesque turmoil that surrounded her in adolescence. The exuberance, travesty and all sorts of transgressions that Olga then witnessed predisposed her, or so she believes, to break all social norms, including one of our culture's two greatest taboos. Thus, following the example of historiographic metafiction, both the novel's narrator and heroine use the past to understand their own current situation, and to tame the uncertainties of the present.

Just as *Olga Arbélina's* narrator both identifies with his heroine in order to deal with his metaphorical emasculation under exile's disempowering effect,²⁴⁰ and looks for a motherly figure in her, the central character of *Une femme aimée* finds a maternal substitute in Catherine the Great who, like himself, was a German living in Russia. This novel too has several narrative levels, one situated during Catherine's reign, one during World War II (Sergei Erdmann's military engagement), one towards the end of Brezhnev's Stagnation (the shooting of Oleg's film), and yet another one in contemporary Russia (the filming of Zhurbin's soap opera). Typically for Makine's oeuvre and, as we saw earlier, for postmodern literature, Oleg is a liminal figure; by virtue of being a Volga German, he occupies a marginal place in Soviet society that in ordinary circumstances might be tolerant yet, during crises, can prove overtly hostile

239 *Ibidem*, p. 90.

240 In the terms of Freud, for whom death is the ultimate form of castration, Olga is a phallic mother as she helps her fatally-ill son to deny his own encroaching death.

towards ethnic minorities.²⁴¹ It is thus, firstly, to legitimate the existence of the German diaspora in Russia and to write back into Russian history a minority excluded from it, that Oleg takes interest in Catherine II who was indeed responsible for recruiting her compatriots as settlers in the country she was to rule. This is not, however, the only reason why Oleg 'revoit la vie de Catherine avec l'intimité d'un souvenir personnel' ['reviews Catherine's life with the intimacy of a memory of his own'] (*UFA*, 50); having lost his mother early and having been estranged from his half-crazy father, the screenwriter re-imagines the empress as a maternal figure, a formidable task given Catherine's notoriety as a licentious woman possessed by ambition and indifferent to her family.²⁴² Foremost, the tsarina is generally remembered as a ruthless monarch who, *inter alia*, ordered the murder of her own husband, brutally repressed Pugachev's rebellion, was instrumental in wiping Poland off Europe's map (she then used the Polish throne as a toilet!), deprived the Ukrainians of the last vestiges of sovereign self-government, reduced the serfs to chattel property,²⁴³ and hampered the Jews' integration.²⁴⁴ To redeem the empress, Oleg dismisses or at least downplays most of the afore-mentioned facts and instead reinvents Catherine as an outsider to Russian society who, by being merciless, protected herself from her political enemies. Additionally, he imagines her as an erudite and progressive monarch striving to reform and modernise Russia, as a talented and prolific playwright, and, finally and perhaps most importantly, as a woman who, blessed (or cursed?) with a strong libido and pining for affection, wanted to love and be loved. The strategy Oleg adopts in order to alter the empress's received image is to liken her to contemporary figures such as his lonely middle-aged neighbour, Zoya, who finds herself among the first victims

241 At the outbreak of World War I, many Volga Germans were deported as enemies of the state. Then, when Germany broke the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, the Volga German Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was dissolved and most of its citizens banished to remote parts of the USSR. Made permanent in 1948, this ban was lifted after Stalin's death. Fred C. Koch, *The Volga Germans: In Russia and in Americas, from 1763 to the Present* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1990).

242 See Richard Wortman, 'The Russian Empress as Mother', in *The Family in Imperial Russia: New Lines in Historical Research*, ed. by David L. Ransel (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), pp. 60–74.

243 *Great Leaders, Great Tyrants? Contemporary Views of World Rulers Who Made History*, ed. by Arnold Blumberg (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995), p. 30.

244 Catherine the Great did so by restricting the Jews' commercial activity, making them pay taxes twice as high as those paid by Christians and confining them to the Pale of Settlement. See Benjamin Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union: The History of a National Minority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 11–14.

of Russia's transformation from communism to capitalism. Other images that are meant to conjure our sympathy for Catherine II are those of a German girl watching snow falling over the Baltic, a loving grandmother darning her grandsons' clothes, or a woman happily in love with a significantly younger man.

To stress the fact that history is a discourse shaped by its tellers and the circumstances in which it is told, Makine shows that when breaking-up with his girlfriend, Lessya, Oleg perceives Catherine as a heartless, sex-crazed and power-hungry woman, and compares her court to a slaughterhouse: 'Comme tout artiste, Oleg parlait de lui-même. [...] [À] travers l'Histoire, il pouvait avouer son amour, montrer l'arrogance des fort, la rareté des attachements fidèles?' ['Like all artists, Oleg was talking about himself. [...] [T]hrough History, he could declare his love, portray the arrogance of the strong, the rarity of true affection?'] (*UFA*, 65) Erdmann is, however, only one of the novel's characters who construe Catherine II as a function of their personal situation, a fact that is meant to underscore history's subjectivity, plurality and indeterminacy. Both the film director, Kozin, and Oleg's supervisor, Lev Bassov, reinvent the empress as a loyal, tender and caring woman, bewitched by her subsequent lovers and capable of looking after them in sickness. The similarity of their visions notwithstanding, Kozin's and Bassov's motivations are different. If Kozin's vision is inspired by his memory of his late wife who, to support him while he was in prison and then banned from working, took a job with radioactive materials and, consequently, died of cancer, Bassov's reinterpretation of Catherine's life provides a counternarrative to his unhappy marriage to a younger woman who exploited and abandoned him in his old age: '[À] travers la vie de la tsarine, Bassov parle de lui-même: sa jeune épouse l'a quitté, au lieu de "veiller sur lui comme sur son fils"' ['[T]hrough the Tsarina's life, Bassov is talking about himself: his young wife who had left him instead of "watching over him like her son"'] (*UFA*, 74) As for Luria, the expert on the Catherinean age, the image of the empress leaving her golden cage with Lansky helps him endure his eight-year *gulag* sentence. The historian's belief in the incognito trip to Italy is shared by Eva Sander, a middle-aged East-German actress playing Catherine in Oleg's film, who simultaneously identifies with the ageing empress and indulges in memories of her own affair with an Italian who, like Lansky, died prematurely. Also, adopting a feminist and hence contemporary standpoint, Sander justifies Catherine's sexual excesses by arguing that in the eighteenth century, to earn a man's respect, a woman had to match his virility. Finally, in his sensationalist and semi-pornographic televised series about the empress, Oleg's cinematographer friend, Zhurbin, plays up Catherine's sexual voracity and hunger for power so that he may teach the New Russians a moral lesson: 'la violence, la richesse, le sexe, le pouvoir [...] c'est une voie qui ne mène pas à

grand-chose. [...] [V]oilà, il y a cette vie où l'on peut tuer, jouir, dominer et tout ça c'est du vide car il faut chercher autre chose ...' ['wars, authority, the flesh [...] is a path that doesn't lead to anywhere very much. [...] [H]ere's a life where they can kill, seek pleasure, dominate others and it's all empty, because there's something else that we need to be looking for ...' (UFA, 256–57)

By presenting his readers with a wide spectrum of perspectives on Catherine II, Makine evidently wishes to foreground history's equivocal, fluctuating and subjective character, and to show that the present is in constant and critical dialogue with the past. Yet, although the author thus seems to adhere to the tenets of historiographic metafiction, it is ostensibly obvious that he undermines the empress's image forged by scholars and preserved in popular imagination only so that he may absolve her of many of the crimes and transgressions of which the historians accuse her. However different their reasons for defending Catherine, the novel's characters all contribute to an idealised representation of the German-born princess. As a result, *Une femme aimée* re-presents the tsarina as a benevolent and progressive ruler, a feminist *avant la lettre* and an emotionally fragile woman, who greatly contributed to Russia's cultural, economic and territorial development and international political prominence.

The Politics of Andreï Makine's Fiction

Like postmodernism's historicity, its political engagement has been hotly debated, the dominant voices in the discussion belonging once again to Eagleton and Jameson, who both regard postmodernism as incapable of instigating political change and as complicitous with advanced capitalism, consumer society and power. For the two critics, postmodernism is, in Hutcheon's words, 'disqualified from political involvement because of its narcissistic and ironic appropriation of existing images and stories and its seemingly limited accessibility'.²⁴⁵ As Malpas puts it, for Eagleton postmodernism fails to take account of the totality of social relations, its relativism, fragmentation, scepticism, localism failing to provide left politics with 'strong ethical [...] foundations'.²⁴⁶ Whereas in the neo-Marxist critic's view, observes Malpas, radical politics must be both oppositional and foundational, postmodern critique

²⁴⁵ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 3.

²⁴⁶ Terry Eagleton, *The Illusion of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 134. Quoted by Malpas, p. 129.

seeks other means to resist contemporary totalities.²⁴⁷ More generally, by being associated with 'games with intertextuality, hyperreality, indeterminacy and simulations of simulations which spiral off into the void without ever touching down on Earth', postmodernism has been seen as having 'nothing of value to say about the collapse of traditional communities in the face of globalisation and the ever-widening gap between the haves and the have-nots'.²⁴⁸ Other thinkers, such as Jürgen Habermas, assimilate postmodernism with various forms of conservatism — old, neo and young —,²⁴⁹ while Foster associates it with the *retour à l'ordre*. Distinguishing two strands within postmodernism — the poststructuralist and the neoconservative —, the critic perceives it as an affirmative, not critical, movement that revisits history by the means of pastiche or, in other words, of 'allusion to canonical and clichéd narratives and works'. By doing so, postmodernism aims to 'beautify reactionary politics'.²⁵⁰ And, since in its treatment of the past postmodern art reduces historical periods to 'ruling-class styles', it fails to narrate the history of 'ex-centrics', 'marginals' or 'losers', as Hutcheon, de Groot or Wesseling argue, but in a nostalgic gesture reinscribes the 'history of victors'.²⁵¹

Militating against Eagleton's position that postmodernism shares modernism's 'apolitical impulses',²⁵² Hutcheon roots postmodern art in the 1960s contestation of authority,²⁵³ that is in feminism, gay studies, Marxism, post-colonialism and poststructuralism.²⁵⁴ Like the Canadian theorist, for whom postmodernism is 'inescapably political',²⁵⁵ Wesseling claims that postmodern writers have 'more affinity with the political bearings of the historical avant-garde than with the detached intellectualism of the modernists', insofar as they are committed to the political uses of history.²⁵⁶ Similarly, according to McHale, the current trend in historical literature revises the content of the historical record, reinterprets it and demystifies or debunks orthodox versions

247 Malpas, p. 129.

248 *Ibidem*, p. 106.

249 Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity', *New German Critique*, 22 (Winter 1981), 3–14 (pp. 13–14). For a discussion of Habermas's argument, see Andreas Huyssen, 'Mapping the Postmodern', *New German Critique*, 33 (Autumn, 1984), 5–52 (pp. 30–2).

250 Foster, p. 70.

251 *Ibidem*, p. 68.

252 Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', p. 394.

253 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 8.

254 Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 6.

255 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 4. See also *ibidem*, p. 6.

256 Wesseling, p. 118.

of the past.²⁵⁷ Finally, for de Groot, the contemporary historical novel 'provides a space for political intervention and reclamation; for innovation and destabilisation';²⁵⁸ thus 'advocat[ing] ideological positions, mourn[ing] a lost history or attack[ing] the mainstream version of events for polemic and political purposes.'²⁵⁹ Having said that, both de Groot and Hutcheon remain sensitive to the fact that even if postmodern literature usually challenges History by telling dissident stories, it may just as well support a reactionary agenda. To put it differently, the self-consciousness marking historiographic metafiction does not necessarily have to be revolutionary or even progressive,²⁶⁰ and may even be 'neo-conservatively nostalgic' or reactionary:²⁶¹

[A]rt can just as easily confirm as trouble received codes, no matter how radical its surface transgressions. Texts could conceivably work to dismantle meaning and the unified humanist subject in the name of right-wing irrationalism as easily as left-wing defamiliarising critique.²⁶²

Yet, despite making allowances for postmodernism's breaking the pattern of revision and dissent, the movement's advocates clearly consider postmodern literature as overwhelmingly radical in its tendency to question authority, unity, centre, teleology, closure, hierarchy, homogeneity and origin.²⁶³

Being seemingly bound up with, to borrow David Wellbery's expression, 'critique of domination',²⁶⁴ Makine's novelistic project has an incontestably political dimension. What remains to be investigated is to what extent Makine's prose challenges dominant ideologies, as do historiographic metafiction, ²⁶⁵ and to what extent it is complicitous with the very power it promises to question and undermine. Before gauging the nature of the political message conveyed by Makine's writing in the chapters to follow, I will now return to *Une femme aimée* to discuss the novel's awareness of the political underpinning of

257 Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 90.

258 de Groot, p. 140.

259 *Idem.*

260 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 183.

261 *Ibidem*, p. XII.

262 *Ibidem*, p. 183.

263 *Ibidem*, p. 57.

264 David E. Wellbery, 'Postmodernism in Europe: Recent German Writing', in *The Postmodern Moment: A Handbook of Contemporary Innovation in the Arts*, ed. by Stanley Trachtenberg (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), pp. 229–49. Quoted by Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 4.

265 Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 4.

the historians' or the historical writers' views, and, by extension, of the author's own consciousness of his ideological mission.

In Makine's oeuvre, most of which is set in the Soviet times, examples of the influence of politics on history writing are easily come by, the communist regime being renowned for manipulating the past for its own political ends. In the next four chapters we will encounter numerous instances of such manipulation, as exemplified by the fallacy of the Stalingrad documentary (*La Fille*) or the peregrinations of Voroshilov's portrait (*Confession*). That the Soviets were not the only ones to meddle with historical record, Makine tells us in *Requiem* where he discloses the anti-Russian agenda of a Western-made documentary about the Eastern Front, or in *L'Homme inconnu* that discusses the ideological bias of post-Soviet studies of the battle of Leningrad.

Likewise, *Une femme aimée* vituperates against both the pre- and post-revolutionary historical studies on Catherine the Great whose legacy was already talked down in tsarist Russia,²⁶⁶ before becoming a taboo subject in the Soviet Union. This is because the nationalistic and prudish brand of Marxism-Leninism championed by Stalin and his followers precluded any praise of a foreign-born (and especially German), female and undeniably immoral pre-revolutionary sovereign.²⁶⁷ In this light, Erdmann's efforts to disclaim the tsarina's reputation as a sex-obsessed woman and a bloody tyrant, and to reposit her as a monarch of remarkable talent, intelligence, insight and diplomatic skill, as well as a vulnerable female seeking a happy and secure relationship, are undoubtedly revisionist in relation to official Soviet representations of Catherine the Great. This is further confirmed by the fact that before embarking on his project, Oleg is sensitised by Bassov about its controversial nature and, later, must defend his screenplay before a team of censors. Contesting Soviet historiography is thus Erdmann's (and the novel's) official purpose, just as it is the purpose of Makine's works focused more closely on World War II and its memory. However, the author's novelistic project has an additional and perhaps less obvious political agenda, which the present study aims to shed light on but which, for now, I will discuss only in relation to Oleg's work.

266 Simon Dixon, 'The Posthumous Reputation of Catherine II in Russia, 1797–1837', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 77.4 (October 1999), 646–79.

267 John T. Alexander, *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. VIII. Tony Lentin, for instance, speaks of 'seventy years of neglect and dismissal in the Soviet period as a foreign adventuress, hypocrite and poseur, indifferent to the needs of "the people" and marginal to the preoccupation of Marxists with "class struggle" and revolution.' Tony Lentin, 'The Return of Catherine the Great', *History Today*, 46.12 (December 1996), 16–21 (p. 14).

The timing of Erdmann's two cinematic projects related to Catherine the Great is, I believe, not insignificant; while the making of the feature film coincides with the end of the Brezhnev era, the shooting of Zhurbin's televised series takes place at the dawn of the post-Soviet period, which was marked by savage capitalism, corruption, the rise of the oligarchy and the collapse of social services with its disastrous consequences for society's least privileged members. Vitaly, in Makine's earlier novels Brezhnev's Stagnation is depicted as a preamble to the fall of communism; both *La Fille* or *Confession* posit Russia's gradual opening to the West and its defeat in Afghanistan as early signs of the USSR's encroaching break-up. That this is how Makine indeed sees the late 1970s is additionally substantiated by the fact that the action of *Une femme aimée* abruptly jumps from Brezhnev's death to post-communist Russia, as if the decade separating the two moments were politically irrelevant. All this suggests that Erdmann's engagement with the 'golden' or 'miraculous' age of Catherine II is motivated by his urge to stoke national pride in his demoralised compatriots at the time of political and economic uncertainty.²⁶⁸ The politicisation of Oleg's work is further suggested by Makine's unusual choice of a cinematographer rather than a writer as his novel's protagonist. This change in relation to his earlier works may have been motivated by the longstanding association of film with propaganda, as illustrated by Lenin's view that '[o]f all the arts cinema is the most important instrument',²⁶⁹ or Anatoly Lunacharsky's²⁷⁰ description of film as 'an incomparable instrument for dissemination of all sorts of ideas' and 'more powerful than any kind of narrow propaganda'.²⁷¹ Contrary to the literature created by his novelistic alter-egos, which Makine sees as moralising but not propagandist, the author himself repeatedly represents cinema as ideologically-driven and hence as a historical source of doubtful value. Such a negative assessment of cinema is illustrated by both the documentaries and feature films which are mentioned by Makine's prose and which, as I will be demonstrating in the chapters to come, are systematically shown to be politically positioned and to grossly distort reality.

In the light of Makine's overwhelmingly negative valorisation of cinema, I read his decision to cast a screenwriter as a self-ironic comment on his own

268 Dixon, p. 648.

269 Quoted by Richard Taylor, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema, 1917–1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 29.

270 Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875–1933) was the first Soviet People's Commissar for Education as well as an art critic and journalist.

271 Quoted in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896–1939*, ed. by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 109.

politically-motivated mission to wrest Catherine the Great from the grips of History and restore her to her private and little-known self. If Oleg's subject translates his desire to counter the volatility of the times he lives in with images of the Russian empire in full swing, Makine's choice to redirect momentarily his attention from World War II to the eighteenth-century can be attached to his homeland's recent re-emergence as a world power led by a semi-authoritarian leader with, significantly enough, a German connection.²⁷² Indeed, critics have noted similarities between Putin's regime and tsarist Russia,²⁷³ some claiming that the President, who, coincidentally, comes from Leningrad, styles himself on Peter the Great,²⁷⁴ while the Kremlin's nostalgia-fuelled endorsement of the former monarchy has been illustrated by its decision to rehabilitate the Romanovs and invite the remaining members of the imperial family to return to Russia.²⁷⁵ Its tsarist sympathies aside, Putin is undoubtedly Russia's first strong ruler to emerge out of the political chaos following the 1991 disintegration of the Soviet Union. Unlike Gorbachev, who unearthed many inconvenient truths about Soviet past, or Yeltsin who was an embarrassment, Putin has promised to restore Russia's self-respect and put his country back on the world's political map. And, as evidenced by the recent vagaries of Russia's foreign policy — meddling in the internal affairs of Ukraine or bombing of US-backed Syrian rebels to boost Bashar al-Assad's authoritarian regime — Putin has been largely successful in doing so. While Russia's recent foreign policy uncannily stirs up memories of expansionism, be it tsarist or Soviet, in its home politics one can discern a return to the autocratic style of governing, Putin's personality cult being matched only by that of Stalin himself.²⁷⁶ As for the specific connection to Catherine II, the President has, for example, founded a girls' school for army officers' offspring in the style of the

272 Having graduated in 1985, Putin was posted to East Germany where he was a KGB agent until the fall of the Berlin Wall. Richard Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 9.

273 Vladimir Shlapentokh, 'Is Putin's Regime Less Vulnerable Than Monarchist Russia in 1916 or the Soviet Union in 1990?', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 26.1 (2010), 54–79.

274 Lilia Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia*, trans. by Antonina W. Bouis (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), p. 350.

275 Nick Paton Walsh, 'Russia prepares to restore the Romanovs', *Guardian*, 20 December 2002 <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/dec/20/russia.nickpatonwalsh>>.

276 Julie A. Cassiday and Emily D. Johnson, 'Putin, Putiniana and the Question of a Post-Soviet Cult of Personality', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 88.4 (October 2010), 681–707.

Smolny Institute for Noble Girls established by the empress.²⁷⁷ More alarmingly, he has organised the re-annexation of Crimea, first appropriated in 1783 from the Ottoman Empire by the empress's regime, to be relinquished in 1954 to Ukraine by Khrushchev in a gesture celebrating Slavic fraternity.

As I will endeavour to demonstrate in the present study, Makine's work is in many ways disturbingly in tune with the current political climate in Russia, or, in some respects, it is even visionary in relation to the recent political developments. Its prophetic character is illustrated, for example, by the publication of *Une femme aimée* a year before the recent re-conquest of Crimea. The same goes for the author's preoccupation with the Great Fatherland War which, manifest since his debut novel, has foretold the fresh revival of the war cult, with the commemorations of 1941–1945 serving the quasi-totalitarian social order imposed by Putin's administration.²⁷⁸ According to Gudkov, the majority of today's Russians — 78% in 2003 as opposed to 44% in 1996 — consider the Great Fatherland War as the most important event in their country's history, 'Victory now stand[ing] as a stone pillar in the desert, the vestige of a weathered rock.'²⁷⁹ Like Putin who, observes Wood, has chosen World War II as the twentieth century's central historical event in order to underline the unity and coherence of the nation and give it legitimacy and status as a world power,²⁸⁰ Makine, as I will argue in Chapters 2 through 5, revisits the Great Fatherland War with the view of restoring the sense of wholeness, harmony and solidarity abolished by the USSR's collapse. In the following chapters, I will thus attempt to show how, echoing both current and Soviet-time narratives about the war, Makine's prose turns the Russo-German conflict into a paradigm of suffering and victory. By the same token, it posits Russia as a Christ-like saviour of the inherently treacherous Europe, places an apparent emphasis on the ordinary Russians who made the Great Victory possible, considers the questioning of the sacredness of the war as an insult and a sacrilege, and, finally, refuses to deal with any morally ambiguous issues relating to Russia's participation in World War II.

277 Wood, p. 176 and p. 196.

278 *Idem*. See also Nina Tumarkin, 'The Great Patriotic War as Myth and Memory', *European Review*, 11.4 (October 2003), 595–611; and Stephen M. Norris, 'Guiding Stars: The Comet-Like Rise of the War Film in Putin's Russia: Recent World War II Films and Historical Memories', *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 1.2 (2007), 163–89.

279 Gudkov.

280 Wood, p. 174.

The Hero of the Soviet Union: From Victor to Victim

Heroes do not die, they live on to serve successive generations as exemplars of wholehearted courage and patriotism, fidelity and military duty, steadfast devotion to the Communist Party, to the socialist Fatherland. They were victorious, they achieved immortality.

N. G. YEGORICHEV

...

Only he who dies for the Fatherland remains immortal.

ALEKSANDER KOVALENKO

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Introduction

Spanning the period of 1941 to the mid-1980s that saw Gorbachev's reforms and the correlated attempts to revise Soviet history, comprising that of the Great Fatherland War, *La Fille* traces the development of Russia's war memory through two generations: the Demidovs, who both experienced the war firsthand, and their daughter, Olya. It is through the eyes of Ivan and his wife, Tatyana, that we see all the key moments of Soviet wartime and post-war history: the bloodbath of the Eastern Front (the battles of Stalingrad and Moscow, the capture of Berlin); the 1946–1947 famine that claims the life of the Demidovs' first child; the postwar return of terror and Stalin's clampdown on war memory; Khrushchev's Thaw and the de-Stalinisation it brought; and, finally, the relative calm and prosperity of the Brezhnev era. Later events, namely the 1980 Moscow Olympics and the advent of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, are depicted from the perspective of both Ivan and Olya, who first studies at the prestigious Maurice-Thorez Institute of Foreign Languages in Moscow and then becomes a translator at the International Trade Centre. The novel's denouement consists in Ivan's discovery of the true nature of his daughter's work

that entails not only espionage but also sexual relations with foreign diplomats and businessmen. This discovery opens the protagonist's eyes to the fallacy of the war cult, to his own ruthless exploitation by the authorities, as well as to Russia's progressive Westernisation, which Ivan conceives of as a compromise of the ideals in the names of which he once fought. *La Fille* then finishes on a pessimistic note: after her father's death from a heart attack, Olya returns to the quasi-European lifestyle that comes with her Moscow job, an ending that communicates Russia's growing neglect for its sacrosanct wartime past and its interconnected and unstoppable espousal of Western-imported values.

By focusing on the Great Fatherland War and its legacy as well as by being concerned with the instability, plurality and provisionality of historical truths, *La Fille* contains much of the author's later work in embryo. Also, with its fragmented narrative that disobeys chronology and is interspersed with meta-fictional comments and intertextual allusions, Makine's debut work bears a structural affinity to his more recent fiction. Having said that, the novel's heterodiegetic narrator or its ample use of free indirect speech, which, popularised by nineteenth-century writers, became a hallmark of modernist fiction, make *La Fille* a hybrid between a traditional historical novel and its post-modern avatar. Yet another key difference between *La Fille* and its successors, many of which narrate the Great Fatherland War and the postwar vicissitudes of its memory through the tales of those sidelined, marginalised or erased by official Soviet historiography, is the fact that Makine's debut novel uncharacteristically stages a protagonist who, as a Hero of the Soviet Union, embodies and validates — at least superficially — the state-concocted version of the war. Having won the highest Soviet distinction for the battle of Stalingrad and having been gravely injured before marching with his regiment all the way to Berlin,¹ the central character of *La Fille* returns from the front able-bodied and then loyally serves the subsequent peacetime regimes as a living icon of the Great Victory. In this sense, Ivan Demidov potentially eludes the paradigm of 'ex-centrics' or 'losers of history' associated, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, with postmodern literature; rather, in Wesseling's terms, he potentially belongs among the winners who make the historical record,² as indeed illustrated by Ivan's role as a moral guide to the young generation or by the inclusion of his testimony in a documentary about Stalingrad.

In the present chapter, whose ambition is to address Makine's novelistic treatment of the divergence between the state-sponsored image of the war

1 For more information about the title of the Hero of the Soviet Union, see Henry Sakaida, *Heroes of the Soviet Union, 1941–45* (Wellingborough: Osprey Publishing, 2004).

2 Wesseling, p. 110.

and the soldiers' private frontline memories, as well as of the causal link between the collapse of the war cult and the USSR's disintegration, my contention will be that, despite Demidov's privileged status, he is portrayed as one of the victims of the Great Fatherland War. The novel thus puts Ivan on a par with those of Makinean protagonists who occupy a liminal position in regard to the official war narrative or are even victimised by the authorities. As I will show in what follows, Demidov's metamorphosis from victor to victim is achieved with a range of narrative techniques and intertextual references intended to highlight the protagonist's childlike gullibility and his consequent exploitation by postwar regimes, as well as his subsequent victimisation by Russia's budding consumer society. I begin my discussion by contextualising Ivan's story with the Aristotelian heroic paradigm, the references to which help Makine not only underscore his protagonist's virtue but also elicit the readers' sympathetic identification with him. I also frame Ivan's rise and fall with the cult of Soviet wartime heroines and heroes, which, established during the war to boost people's morale and to encourage further self-sacrificial deeds, began to crumble in the spirit of *glasnost* when many stories were revealed to have been fabricated. I consequently ponder why Makine cast a Hero of the Soviet Union at the very moment when heroic wartime tales were being debunked, anticipating the collapse of the Soviet metanarrative and, ultimately, of the polity that this metanarrative had been legitimating. Adopting a psychoanalytical perspective, I then concentrate on Makine's multiple allusions to the mirror stage, which help to figure Ivan as a small child preparing to enter the paternally-connoted symbolic order, and endow the war itself with an ego-building potential. A similar effect is attained, as I also demonstrate in this chapter, with implicit references to Andrei Tarkovsky's 1962 debut feature film. The striking parallels between *La Fille* and *Ivan's Childhood* reinforce the trope of Demidov's infantilisation and victimhood, and thus encourage the reader's sympathy for the trusting, not to say naïve protagonist. In the chapter's second half I reconsider some of the novel's previously analysed scenes in a different light, namely as foregrounding the discrepancy between the war cult and Ivan's private frontline memories. Framing my discussion with postmodern theories, I discuss the novel's apparent distrust towards the totalising narrative of the Great Fatherland War as a grand tale of heroism and glory, which fostered forgetting rather than remembrance. Here I also consider some of the issues raised by the novel and related to history writing, such as the fallibility of human memory, the colonisation of private memories by state-sponsored accounts of the past, or the plurality, evanescence and ideological bias of the historical record. Finally, I evaluate the novel's overall stance on the war myth, which *La Fille* shows capable of consolidating Soviet society while providing

individuals with pride and a sense of moral superiority over the West; yet, as Russia gradually embraces Western ways and values such as individualism, mercantilism or moral laxity, the myth is shown to be losing its currency. Throughout my reading of *La Fille* I pay attention to its typically postmodern tropes and narrative devices in order to draw, in line with the present book's central objective, some conclusions about the relationship between the novel's form and thematics, on the one hand, and its politics, on the other.

The Soviet Union Is No More — Its Heroes Live On³

That Ivan Demidov's trajectory is meant to resemble that of Soviet wartime heroes who were ordinary men capable of extraordinary deeds transpires from the duality of the protagonist's name alone; while 'Demidov' bears a phonological kinship to the French noun 'demi-dieu' (demigod), Ivan is a generic Russian forename often given to protagonists in folktales. Also, the title of Catherine Merridale's book on the experience of Soviet soldiers on the Eastern Front — *Ivan's War* — confirms that Demidov's first name is the Russian equivalent of the British 'Tommy', the German 'Fritz' or the French 'Jacques'.⁴ Indeed, being courageous, generous, patriotic and altruistic, Ivan closely fits the portrait of an archetypal Soviet soldier, as painted by wartime and postwar Soviet media:

He is simple, healthy, strong and kind, far-sighted, selfless, and unafraid of death. He never dwells on the dark side of the war [but looks] towards the future, a bright utopia for which he is prepared to sacrifice his life. [...] Were he to die [...] there would be no hint of panic, failure or doubt to cloud the story, let alone the suggestion that this might be a man who looted the cities that his army came to liberate.⁵

In other words, Demidov, who volunteers for the front as an adolescent and for whom, consequently, the war constitutes the formative experience, represents

3 The title of this section has been borrowed from the heading of a newspaper article by Alla Malakhova published in *Nezavisimaya gazeta* in 1994. Quoted by Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 247.

4 Merridale, *Ivan's War*. Merridale herself overtly acknowledges that Ivan is 'the Russian rifleman, the equivalent of the British Tommy or the German Fritz' (p. xxvi).

5 *Ibidem*, p. 5.

the 'frontline generation',⁶ as Elena Seniavskaya has called the cohort who, in Mark Edele's words, 'had not been established in adult life before the war', who 'did most of the actual fighting (and most of the dying as well)' and for whom 'the front became the fundamental experience of their lives'. In addition, the frontline generation soldiers 'had massive readjustment problems when they came back',⁷ just as Makine's protagonist does, finding it hard to reconcile the deprivation and political repressions marking the war's aftermath with his expectations of a more prosperous and freer life than that of his parents who experienced enforced collectivisation, famine and terror in the 1930s. More critical of Soviet wartime reality than Seniavskaya or Edele, Tumarkin describes the frontline generation as 'youngsters [who], imbued with a romanticised vision of their army and insanely inappropriate expectations of success, willingly offered themselves as cannon fodder in Stalin's ruthlessly run war.'⁸ The critic adds that these men's hopes for a better life were then frustrated by Stalin's heartless attitude towards war veterans as well as by the dire living conditions resulting from the damage inflicted upon the Soviet state by the war.⁹

While Ivan is an everyman of humble roots and, like most Soviet secular saints, an orphan, his surname suggests him to be endowed with superhuman capabilities. In other words, the name brings to mind the Aristotelian model of the tragic hero who may indeed be a demigod but is usually just a better version of ourselves, and who, like Ivan, is a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity, yet not through his depravity but rather through a weakness, a flaw or a fatal error of judgement. In Demidov's case, the latter materialises as the protagonist's childlike gullibility towards Soviet authorities, and Stalin in particular, and towards communist teleology, including the myth of the Great Fatherland War. A source of the protagonist's good fortune at first, Ivan's trust in the Soviet system is, as in a Greek tragedy, the reason for his subsequent demise, which is designed to arouse our pity as well as fear, for misfortunes have befallen a man just like us.¹⁰ Finally, like the paradigmatic Greek hero who loses his immortality once stripped of his heroic status, Demidov becomes

6 E. S. Seniavskaya, *Frontove pokolenie, 1941–1945: Istoriko-psikhologicheskoye issledovanie* (Moscow: 1995), p. 18. Quoted by Edele, 'Soviet Veterans as an Entitlement Group, 1945–1955', p. 113.

7 Edele, 'Soviet Veterans as an Entitlement Group, 1945–1955', p. 113.

8 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 60.

9 *Ibidem*, pp. 91–2.

10 Charles H. Reeves, 'The Aristotelian Concept of a Tragic Hero', *The American Journal of Philology*, 73.2 (1952), 172–88.

vulnerable after the certificate that goes with his Gold Star is confiscated, and dies when he must part with the medal itself.

Notwithstanding these correspondences between Ivan's story and the heroic model, in his construction of Demidov's character and story Makine also heavily draws on the paradigm of the Soviet wartime hero. The Soviet propaganda machine started churning out heroic stories right after the German attack in June 1941, yet, as Tumarkin notes, the Russians had already been well prepared for the hero cult, having been reared on the lives of saints and having already become accustomed to venerating Lenin and Stalin.¹¹ Moreover, the tradition of worshipping individuals that helped the Soviet war effort had already been well in place in the 1920s when the USSR officially declared itself a 'Land of Heroes' and when the hyperactive industrialisation programme created the prototype of the hard-working, diligent, energetic and indefatigable model worker.¹² Whatever the progenitors of wartime heroes, their stories were designed to nourish hopes for an early victory and, in Rosalinde Sartorti's terms, to 'g[i]ve sense and meaning to the manifold aspects of terror and despair, which would otherwise be beyond comprehension.'¹³ Similarly, Adrienne Harris states that stories of valiant and selfless young women and men, such as Kosmodemyanskaya, 'unified the nation in horror, grief and rage, and motivated the Soviet people to fearlessly fight to avenge their [martyrs]'.¹⁴ The practice of concocting tales of exceptionally courageous soldiers who would be enshrined in the arts and the media as moral exemplars so that they inspire Soviet people to give all to the war effort and not to lose heart in the face of the German offensive,¹⁵ is illustrated by the story of Nikolai Gastello, who flew his burning aircraft into a cluster of enemy tanks. Another heroic story to which we find reference in Makine's oeuvre is that of the twenty-eight men of the Panfilova Division who allegedly fought to the death to prevent the Germans

11 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 77. See also Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

12 Rosalinde Sartorti, 'On the Making of Heroes, Heroines, and Saints', in *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, ed. by Richard M. Stites (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) pp. 176–93 and p. 178. For a discussion of the panoply of the new Soviet 'saints', see also Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia* (New York: Viking, 2000).

13 Sartorti, p. 179.

14 Harris, 'The Lives and Deaths of a Soviet Saint in the Post-Soviet Period', p. 278.

15 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, pp. 76–81.

from reaching Moscow, while their *politruk* supposedly flung himself together with some hand grenades under a German tank.¹⁶

Dead or alive, wartime heroines and heroes became subject of scrutiny, just as did other aspects of Russian history when the Soviet Union began to crumble in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Demystification revealed painful truths about the individuals who had been worshipped for decades, as in the case of Alexander Matrosov, rumoured to have been forced to sacrifice himself on command.¹⁷ Likewise, rather than by the Germans, Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya may have been killed by Russian peasants angry about having their property torched.¹⁸ Sartorti notes that many found it extremely hard to admit to have hailed the wrong saints and that the dethronement of the Heroines and Heroes of the Soviet Union met with widespread resentment.¹⁹ Yet, despite the compromising revelations, some stories, such as Kosmodemyanskaya's, managed to maintain their grip over the Russians' imagination, showing legends to be superior to historical facts.²⁰ In this context, Makine's decision to stage a Hero of the Soviet Union as his first novel's protagonist can be more fully appreciated. For, as well as drawing attention to the disparity between the soldier's actual frontline experience and the official war narrative, the author evidently wanted to capture the transitional moment when, preoccupied with more immediate concerns and more recent wars, such as the Afghan conflict, his

16 *Ibidem*, p. 76. A *politruk* was a political commissar in the Red Army responsible for the soldiers' ideological education and loyalty to the government.

17 See *ibidem*, p. 78. As a homeless and parentless young hooligan brought up in a re-education camp, Matrosov had no choice but to enter a punishment battalion. There he finally met his death when he shielded his comrades by throwing his body over an exploding German pillbox. Sartorti, p. 182.

18 More recent sources indicate that Kosmodemyanskaya had been betrayed by a fellow partisan and that it was Russian peasants that beat her for having burned down their houses. See Elena S. Seniavskaya, 'Heroic Symbols: The Reality and Mythology of the War', *Russian Studies in History*, 37.1 (Summer 1988), 61–87 (76–8).

19 Sartorti, p. 188.

20 Anja Tippner, 'Girls in Combat: Zoia Kosmodem'ianskaia and the Image of Young Soviet Wartime Heroines', *Russian Review*, 73.3 (2014), 371–88; Harris, 'The Lives and Deaths of a Soviet Saint in the Post-Soviet Period'; and 'Memorialization of a Martyr and Her Mutilated Bodies: Public Monuments to Soviet War Hero Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, 1942 to the Present', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 5.1 (2012), 73–90. New research into the Zoya myth had little effect on the way Leo Arnshtam, the director of the 1946 film about the first Soviet woman-hero, or Margarita Aliger, the author of the 1944 book about the secular saint, regarded Kosmodemyanskaya; both Arnshtam and Aliger insisted that the story was more important than the actual details, and that their depiction of Zoya had not been invented but reflected the truth they believed in. Sartorti, p. 190.

compatriots began losing interest in their wartime past. *La Fille* can therefore, as I will argue throughout this chapter, be conceived of as a lament for those who sacrificed their life or health — or at least were prepared to do so — in a war that now not only the West but also the Russians themselves are beginning to forget and neglect.

The Intelligible Body

Like those of the Soviet heroines and heroes who lived to enjoy the Victory, Demidov is expected to emblematisé wartime bravery and sacrifice, and, as a result, encourage future generations to defend their motherland should a need arise. As illustrated by the protagonist's carefully staged school visits, during which he vaunts the Red Army's exploits, Demidov becomes, in Murielle Lucie Clément's words, 'un message publicitaire [...] empreint de poésie guerrière' [an advertising message suffused with war poetry],²¹ this message being: '[V]ous aussi pouvez vous conduire en héros et vous vivrez assez longtemps pour le raconter. [...] Partez en guerre et revenez Héros couvert de médailles' ['[Y]ou too can act like a hero and you will live long enough to tell the tale. [...] Go to war and return as a bemedalled Hero'].²² To translate Clément's comment into Foucauldian terms, Ivan is transformed into an 'intelligible body' (*un corps intelligible*), which, inscribed with specific cultural meanings, must speak for itself, explaining the naturalness of disciplinary procedures while concealing the coercive mechanisms behind them.²³ And it is indeed these coercive mechanisms that create, according to Foucault, a modern-day soldier, shaping, moulding, correcting and training peasants like Ivan so that each one of them may become a 'docile body' (*un corps docile*): '[un] corps qu'on manipule, qu'on façonne, qu'on dresse, qui obéit, qui répond, qui devient habile ou dont les forces se multiplient' ['the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skilful, and increases its forces.']²⁴

21 Murielle Lucie Clément, 'Idéalisation et désacralisation d'un héros dans *La Fille d'un Héros de l'Union soviétique* (1990) d'Andreï Makine', *Revista Romana di Studi Culturali*, 2 (2005), 19–36 (p. 29).

22 *Ibidem*, p. 30. My own translation.

23 Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 138.

24 *Idem*. This and all the following translations of quotations from *Surveiller et punir* come from *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Vintage Books, 1997).

Unlike Clément for whom fallen soldiers could not bear witness to the positive image of the Great Victory,²⁵ other scholars assert that the best Soviet heroes were the dead ones: having sacrificed their most prized possession for the Motherland, they could not claim, states Tumarkin, any reward for their war-time accomplishments. Additionally, the likes of Kosmodemyanskaya, Gastello or Matrosov were the ideal heroes since, being dead, they could not interfere with the tales made up about them by the state.²⁶ In contrast, Demidov risks to compromise the positive image of Victory, which ties in with the novel's central theme of the divergence between image and reality. To live up to his hagiography, Ivan has to, for example, conceal his brief imprisonment by the Germans; otherwise, in line with Stalin's definition of Soviet Prisoners of War as traitors,²⁷ he and his family would have suffered severe sanctions.²⁸ With this seemingly minor detail Makine addresses the tragic lot of POWs, which was taboo under communism.²⁹ Preparing us for Ivan's revelation, the author mentions the plight of soldiers who fell into German captivity when, relatively early in the novel, he has Ivan's neighbours speculate about their missing son. Whereas the mother naïvely hopes that her boy has been taken prisoner, the father, more realistic, says that, should this be the case, his son would have been immediately sent 'derrière l'Oural, et même encore plus loin.' ['beyond the Urals or even farther.'] (*FHUS*, 51)³⁰ Later in the novel, when Party officials try to confiscate his Gold Star, Demidov confirms this by proclaiming: 'Si on l'avait découvert, il y a longtemps que je pourrais à la Kolyma.' ['If it had been found out, I'd have been rotting in a camp at Kolyma long ago.'] (*FHUS*, 130) The authorities' decision to withdraw Ivan's heroic title comes as a response

25 Clément, 'Idéalisation et désacralisation d'un héros' p. 30.

26 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 80.

27 Here is Stalin's statement that sealed the fate of Soviet POWs: 'There are no Russian prisoners of war. The Russian soldier fights on till death. If he chooses to become prisoner he is automatically excluded from the Russian community.' Quoted by Steven Merritt Miner, *Stalin's Holy War: Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), p. 56. See also Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, pp. 71–2.

28 The sanctions awaiting POWs are exemplified by the lot of the protagonist's of Solzhenitsyn's novel and Ivan's namesake who serves a ten-year gulag sentence for having let himself be captured by the enemy. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, trans. by Ralph Parker (New York: Dutton, 1963).

29 Makine returns to the question of POWs in *Requiem*, where he stages a woman banished to Siberia for having been a forced worker in Germany.

30 This and all the following translations of quotations from *La Fille d'un Héros de l'Union soviétique* come from *A Hero's Daughter*, trans. by Geoffrey Strachan (New York: Arcade, 2003).

to the widening of the gap between the protagonist's official image and reality; after his wife's death, Demidov succumbs to depression, starts drinking heavily and, to feed his vodka habit, sells off his medals, which, as evidenced by the scene in which the police try to catch Ivan red-handed, was strictly illegal. Finally, Ivan engages in a brawl in a Moscow shop, for which he stands trial.

Ivan's Childhood

In *La Fille* which, like Makine's other novels, foregrounds the unreliability of evidence, and especially of photographs, the divergence between the protagonist's official persona and his private self is conveyed with visual images, be they still or moving. Before discussing Ivan's childhood photo in this section and the Stalingrad documentary later in the chapter, I will now briefly comment upon two photographic images: the portrait adorning the wall of honour in Ivan's town and the identity photo featured in his book of service record. If the taking down of Demidov's portrait illustrates the idea that history is a function of the present discussed in Chapter 1, the contrast between the identity photo showing 'un gars au crâne rond et rasé, presque un adolescent' ['a young lad with a round, shaven head, almost an adolescent'] (*FHUS*, 198), and the demoralised old man Demidov has become articulates the discrepancy between the heroic legend and the protagonist's dismal postwar existence. Inverting the Dorian Grey paradigm, the photo that remains stubbornly unchanged may also be a subtle allusion to the Greek ideal of the hero's eternal youth and immortality, which was also part of the cult of Soviet wartime heroes such as Kosmodemyanskaya.³¹

Like the two afore-mentioned images that form part of the inquiry into Ivan's identity underpinning the story told by the novel, Demidov's only childhood photo confirms the discrepancy between appearances and reality, while, typically for postmodern fiction, exposing the historical documents' fallacy and political bias. The image in question also helps to situate the protagonist within the specific political context and explains his veneration of Stalin. Finally, as we will see later, the photo aligns Ivan yet more closely with the Soviet heroic paradigm, as it anticipates his orphanhood and suggests his predisposition to superhuman bravery to follow from the upbringing he received in the 1930s. The image in question shows Ivan among pioneers gathered in a summer camp under a banner saying 'Merci au camarade Staline pour notre enfance

31 Harris, 'The Lives and Deaths of a Soviet Saint in the Post-Soviet Period', p. 281.

heureuse!' ['Thank you, Comrade Stalin, for our happy childhood!'] (*FHUS*, 18) If here the slogan is left without commentary, in *Requiem* a similar image triggers the narrator's meditation on his father's ideological indoctrination and, by extension, on the socio-political climate of the 1930s when the Soviet state cast itself in the role of a benevolent and generous, albeit severe, father:

[Pavel] croyait vraiment que l'Armée rouge était la plus belle et la plus forte au monde, que les travailleurs de tous les pays n'aspiraient qu'à vivre comme les gens de [son village], qu'il existait quelque part à Moscou ce mystérieux Kremlin surmonté d'étoiles rouges où vivait celui qui, de jour comme de nuit, pensait à chaque habitant de leur immense pays, prenait des décisions toujours justes et sages, démasquait les ennemis. [...] [Pavel] détestait les koulaks et disait, en répétant les récits de manuels, que c'étaient des 'buveurs de sang'.

[Pavel] really believed that the Red Army was the finest and strongest in the world, that the workers of all countries aspired only to live like the people of [his village], and that somewhere in Moscow there existed that mysterious Kremlin, surmounted with red stars, where the being dwelt who spent his days and nights thinking about every inhabitant of their immense country, who always made wise and just decisions, unmasked enemies. [...] [Pavel] detested the kulaks and, echoing the stories from his school manuals, called them 'bloodsuckers'.]

RE, 131

Like Pavel's, Ivan's childhood photo must have been taken in 1936 or shortly thereafter, as the famous poster with the same caption portraying Stalin surrounded by children was published that very year. It was also in 1936 that Stalin, whose fatherhood of Soviet society was systematically signified by the presence of children,³² appeared in a newspaper photograph as Grandfather Frost, the secularised equivalent of Santa Claus, standing next to a New Year tree decorated with schools, planes, buses and other such 'gifts', and surrounded by

32 Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 234. Brooks notes a shift between the Bolsheviks' and Stalin's policy regarding family. While the former conceived of dependants as a burden preventing women and men from giving their best to the construction of a socialist society, around 1936 official policy became paternalistic, pro-natalist and family oriented (p. 90).

bright-faced, smiling children.³³ With such images the Soviet state was striving to re-imagine a bloody tyrant, who decreed that children as young as twelve could be executed, as a lover and benefactor of the Soviet Union's youngest citizens.³⁴ In this context, what should be an innocent memento of a child's holiday, becomes, firstly, a *memento mori*, as the photograph anticipates the untimely end of Ivan's childhood at the outbreak of the war. Secondly, the image vehicles Stalinist propaganda, reiterating an official Soviet core value: the citizens are immeasurably beholden to the leader, the Party and the state.³⁵ Having become Ivan's *only* childhood recollection, a fact illustrating Susan Sontag's point that a photograph is not so much an instrument of memory as an invention of it or a replacement,³⁶ the picture communicates the corrosive influence of the official discourse on Demidov's memories and self-image. More generally, it corroborates Hutcheon's observation that '[t]he absent past can only be inferred from circumstantial evidence,'³⁷ this evidence being always necessarily subjective, unreliable and politically invested.³⁸

By alluding to Stalin's paternal role, the summer camp photo also foretells the protagonist's becoming an orphan when, in 1941, his mother is brutally assassinated by the Germans. Given the long-standing tradition of orphans populating Europe's literary landscape,³⁹ including Makine's own oeuvre, Demidov's status makes him an ideal candidate for a character of a novel while in the light of the fact that the majority of Soviet wartime heroines and heroes had no living parents, he is also a perfect candidate for a Hero of the Soviet Union.⁴⁰ Sartorti hypothesizes that it was precisely Matrosov's orphanhood that made him more convincing and more appealing to the public than other soldiers who committed exactly the same act. Trying to elucidate the special place of orphans in Soviet culture, which is reflected in the condition of the majority of literary protagonists of the time, Katerina Clark invokes the father-

33 *Ibidem*, pp. 69–72. Here Brooks enumerates other examples of propaganda posters showing Stalin as a lover of children.

34 Introduced in 1935, Article 12 of the Criminal Code served to round up the children of those already purged for political crimes in line with the belief that an apple never falls far from the tree. See Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890–1991* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 237–40.

35 Brooks, p. xv.

36 Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 165.

37 Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 73.

38 Wesseling, p. 71.

39 Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 134.

40 Sartorti, p. 187.

lessness of Lenin and Stalin, as well as to many prominent 1930s personages, such as Maxim Gorky, Alexei Stakhanov or Sergei Kirov.⁴¹

On the diegetic level, Ivan's parentlessness explains his decision to join the partisans and then the regular ranks of the Red Army:

Longtemps il avait été obsédé par la pensée d'une vengeance atroce, d'un règlement de comptes personnel, par le désir de voir se débattre dans des tortures cruelles celui qui avait posé pour la photo, avec le corps de l'enfant au bout de sa baïonnette.

[For a long time the notion of an appalling vengeance obsessed him, a personal settling of accounts, a desire to see this man, who had posed for the photograph with the child's body impaled on his bayonet, writhing in terrible torment.]

FHUS, 23

The baby mentioned here is Ivan's infant brother, killed, just like his mother, before the protagonist's very eyes. The horror of the scene is heightened by the fact that for the German soldier the gruesome murder — impaled on a bayonet, Kolka writhes and screams — becomes an opportunity for a trophy photo. It is noteworthy that in this episode Makine uses a staple image of early Soviet wartime propaganda that often portrayed the Germans as child killers, as illustrated by the 1942 poster captioned 'Red Army Soldiers, save us!' and showing a Russian mother and child, huddled against each other and threatened by a blood-stained German bayonet. Just like the German trophy photos printed in Soviet press at the outset of the conflict,⁴² this poster was part of the campaign of hatred launched by Soviet authorities during the first weeks of the war,⁴³ which, demonising the Nazis,⁴⁴ meant to incite young men to take revenge on the enemy and to contribute to the ferocity of Soviet warfare.⁴⁵

41 Clark, p. 134. Clark notes that during the 1930s even those who lost only one parent were referred to as orphans.

42 David Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War, And the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), pp. 98–9.

43 See Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, pp. 74–5.

44 Argyrios K. Pistotis, 'Images of Hate in the Art of War', in *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, ed. by Stites, pp. 141–56.

45 *Ibidem*, p. 141. It is worth quoting here the writer and journalist Ilya Ehrenburg: 'Hatred is the moral justification of war. We hate the Germans not only because they kill defenceless people. We hate the Germans because we must kill them.' Another example of the campaign of hatred waged by Soviet writers is Konstantin Simonov's poem *Kill Him!* (*Ubei*

Mimetic in relation to the propagandist portrayal of the first months of the German invasion, Ivan's story is also intertextually related to some of the war's posterior artistic representations, as exemplified by the kinship between *La Fille* and *Ivan's Childhood*. Apart from potentially appealing to his French readers, Tarkovsky's debut feature being well-known in France,⁴⁶ Makine's implicit allusions to Ivan Bondarev's story help him to reposit his hero as a tragic victim of the war and, consequently, to arouse his readers' sympathy for him.⁴⁷ Also, by intertextually linking his debut novel to Tarkovsky's film, Makine may have wished to both question the traditional Soviet portrayal of the Great Fatherland War and align himself with avant-garde aesthetics. For, shot in the spirit of the Thaw, *Ivan's Childhood* fitted in with the new non-heroic and personal approach to the subject of the war, while avoiding the excessively chauvinistic patriotism of Soviet war cinema of the time.⁴⁸ As for the film's formal aspect, one critic has talked about a Socialist Realist artefact being turned into a product of 'socialist surrealism'.⁴⁹ Having said that, the film still emphasises Ivan's vitriolic — and fully justified — hatred of the Germans who are firmly linked to atrocities and mindless cruelty, whereas Soviet soldiers are portrayed as invariably simple and kindly, and Soviet officers as fatherly and competent.⁵⁰

There are numerous parallels between *La Fille* and *Ivan's Childhood*, whose twelve-year-old protagonist witnesses his mother's and neighbours' massacre by the Germans, as does indeed Demidov. Motivated by the desire to get back at those who killed his nearest and dearest, Ivan Bondarev also lies about his age to join reconnaissance troops and gather information about the enemy at the cost of his own life. Though in contrast to Tarkovsky's hero, who continues to be driven by wrath in his determination to fight the Germans, Demidov learns to recognise a human being in the enemy, the two Ivans are both meant to be more victims than heroes.⁵¹ This is because in Tarkovsky's film the heroic

Ego!): 'So kill at least one of them!/As soon as you can./Each one you see,/Kill him! Kill him! Kill!' Quoted by Brown, p. 244.

46 This is largely due to the controversy surrounding the film, with Jean-Paul Sartre defending it against the criticism of the Italian Left. See *Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews*, ed. by John Gianvito (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), p. 164.

47 For an analysis of the film see, for example, Nariman Skakov, *The Cinema of Tarkovsky: Labyrinths of Space and Time* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012), pp. 18–20.

48 Vida T. Johnson, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 69.

49 Skakov, p. 16.

50 Johnson, p. 69.

51 *Idem.*

tale gives way to a drama of a lost childhood,⁵² Bondarev's military achievements being overshadowed by his castaway, orphaned condition while the boy himself is stripped of both heroism and glory.⁵³ The theme of lost childhood is also strongly present in *La Fille* whose central character's early years are, contrary to the message transmitted by the holiday camp photo, overshadowed by collectivisation, famine and wartime horrors. Finally, Demidov's intertextual connection to Bondarev revives the novel's other recurring trope, which is Ivan's childlike innocence and which, as we will see later, is pursued through implicit references to the mirror stage, or through Olya's dream of her father becoming a doll.

Fathers, Mothers and Sons

Ivan's orphanhood may be read at yet another level, a child without a father, as Clark suggests, being a child without an identity.⁵⁴ In the Soviet context where, as we will see in my discussion of Ivan's recovery from a head wound, a new sense of history and genealogy were being elaborated,⁵⁵ 'all [we]re orphans until they f[ou]nd their identity in the "great family" [of Soviet society]'.⁵⁶ In both real life and Socialist Realist literature the father was displaced by a mentor, just as Stalin was Lenin's chosen 'pupil'. Emulating this pattern, society as a whole was now to be made of 'fathers' and 'sons' — or rather of mentors and disciples —, the rationale for the election of the latter deriving from 'their superior nature, extraordinary service, and sacrifice' as well as from their 'consciousness'.⁵⁷

If not all 'sons', notes Clark, were to undergo the rite with their 'fathers', Ivan Demidov is undoubtedly one of the *chosen*, as corroborated by both his heroic status and Stalin's recurrent presence in his story. Already a father figure during the protagonist's childhood, the generalissimo makes an unforgettable impression on Ivan as his regiment is reviewed on Red Square before being sent off to the front. Later, Ivan goes into battle with Stalin's name on his lips, and it is Stalin's presence in Moscow that motivates him to defend so fearlessly the capital. Shortly after the war, Ivan marries Tatyana under the portrait of Stalin

52 Skakov, p. 15.

53 *Idem.*

54 Clark, p. 133.

55 *Ibidem*, p. 136.

56 *Ibidem*, p. 135.

57 *Ibidem*, p. 145.

that has supplanted the traditional icon, while the priest has been replaced by the chief of the *kolkhoz*, an amputee war veteran ‘au visage émacié d’un saint d’icône’ [‘who had the emaciated face of a saint on an icon’] (*FHUS*, 37). The socio-political reality described here testifies to not only the enforced secularisation of Soviet life, but also the special status of the Great Fatherland War that has indeed replaced religion; if wartime heroes have now become the new saints and martyrs to be worshipped, the man to whom victory was being attributed has taken the place of God himself. It is thus highly ironic that, during the Thaw, Ivan is chosen for the job of removing Stalin’s statue, a job that he is reluctant to accept since it was his and his comrades’ belief in Stalin’s wisdom and fortitude that fuelled their patriotic zeal. Finally, the transformative moment in Ivan’s life occurs at Stalingrad, a city that, renamed in 1925 to commemorate Stalin’s role in the battles that took place nearby in 1918,⁵⁸ had a symbolic significance for the Germans and the Russians alike.⁵⁹ On the di-ge-tic level, Stalingrad derives its importance from the fact that Ivan receives the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for his participation in this breakthrough battle. No less importantly, the protagonist’s most vivid and intimate wartime memory is related to the epiphany — not to say rebirth — that he experiences during a respite in the fighting. It is when Ivan leaves the sun-drenched battlefield that in a forest clearing he comes across a pool of water in which he quenches his thirst, from which he draws water for his wounded comrades and which allows him to contemplate the reflection of his face.

Because it encapsulates the divergence between private frontline memories and the patriotic bathos of the official image of the war, what I term ‘the little pool episode’ can be viewed as the novel’s key scene and therefore deserves closer scrutiny. Like many other aspects of *La Fille*, the scene bears resemblance to *Ivan’s Childhood*, the two texts opposing the battlefield to the beauty and perennial quality of nature. Yet, whereas Demidov manages to escape, however briefly, the man-made hell of the war when he delves into a forest, Bondarev can only flee the gory wartime reality in his sleep. The dreamlike sequences in *Ivan’s Childhood* feature nature, and in particular trees, which are, in Vida Johnson’s words, ‘a traditional symbol of life, of the power, endurance and beauty of nature, and a link between the earth and the sky, the

58 Phillip Casula and Jeronim Perovic, *Identities and Politics During the Putin Presidency: The Foundations of Russia’s Stability* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 271.

59 If for Hitler Stalingrad’s importance was at first strategic (its capture would have paved his way to the riches of the Transcaucasian oil fields), it later became as symbolic as it was for Stalin himself, who would hold on to the left bank of the Volga at all cost. See Geoffrey Jukes, *Hitler’s Stalingrad Decisions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 5.

material and the divine.⁶⁰ Another element uniting the two texts is the call of a bird, which reminds Demidov to return to the battlefield and in Tarkovsky's feature debut provides the soundtrack to the protagonist's sun-shot dream of a carefree childhood.⁶¹ Yet another parallel between the film and the book is the presence of water: the little pool in which Demidov satisfies his thirst echoes the bucket which Bondarev's mother carries and from which the boy drinks avidly without lifting or tilting it as if it were indeed a lake. However, whereas in *Ivan's Childhood* water, including that offered to the boy by his mother, is shown to have its source in the subterranean rivers of Hades and therefore has deadly connotations,⁶² in *La Fille d'un Héros* it is endowed with life-giving properties, thus opposing its antagonistic element which is the fire of the battle. Water's positive significance is then strengthened by the comparison of its colour to that of the traditional Russian drink of black tea, which, featuring profusely in Makine's novels, denotes conviviality, family life, friendship or even sexual desire.⁶³ If water is thus a substitute for a national drink of restorative quality, it also has a maternal quality, especially when illuminated by Gaston Bachelard's psychoanalysis that construes water as a kind of milk and as the only element capable of cradling.⁶⁴ This is even more so in Makine's native cultural tradition, as in Russian amniotic fluid is simply called waters (*vody*), in parts of the country not only rivers but also water in general is addressed as 'mother', and the ritual of the Russian bathhouse (*bania*) is maternally connoted.⁶⁵ Illuminated by the symbolism of Tarkovsky's film, the little pool episode can be understood as the orphaned protagonist's symbolic return to the family fold, nature standing in for his *motherland* (*rodina-mat*) and Stalin for a stern but benevolent father. Consequently, as it will become apparent later in the chapter, the episode is not entirely inconsistent with its politicised interpretation offered by the Stalingrad documentary, which, as we will see a little later, promulgates

60 Johnson, p. 212.

61 Skakov, p. 16.

62 *Ibidem*, p. 24.

63 In *La Musique* Alexei Berg divulges his tragic life story to the novel's narrator over endless glasses of strong tea, and in *Le Livre des brèves amours éternelles* the orphaned protagonist is always welcomed by his childhood sweetheart with a glass of tea. In *Le Testament* Charlotte brews tea as a sign of her Russification, and the eponymous protagonist of *Olga Arbélina* and her teenage son become sexually bonded thanks to Olga's tea-drinking habit.

64 Gaston Bachelard, *L'Eau et les rêves* (Paris: Corti, 1942), p. 158. For a study of the maternal significance of water in Makine's oeuvre, see Duffy, 'The Russian Exile's Feeling for Snow'.

65 Rancour-Laferrière, p. 191. See in particular Chapter 8, 'Born in a *Bania*: The Masochism of Russian Bathhouse Ritual', pp. 181–201.

the official and ideologically-charged image of the war at the expense of Ivan's private frontline memories.⁶⁶

Ivan in the Mirror

The reading of the 'little pool episode' as Ivan's rebirth into the great family of Soviet society is additionally invited by the scene's implicit allusion to the mirror stage (*le stade du miroir*), a moment which Lacan associates with the figure of the mother but which also paves the child's way towards its alienation within the paternally-connoted symbolic order. Holding the infant of between six and eighteen months of age in front of a looking-glass or even acting herself as the child's mirror image, the mother helps it to negotiate its way through this moment of self-discovery, self-awareness and individuation as an independent subject.⁶⁷ Just as the child in front of the looking-glass holds, Narcissus-like, its reflection in an amorous gaze and is amazed to see that what it believed to be a collection of disjointed members (*le corps morcelé*) is a cohesive totality, Ivan is surprised at the integrity of his body that, as illustrated by the fate of his dead or injured comrades, has been threatened by disintegration: 'C'est moi ... — les mots se formaient lentement dans sa tête — Moi, Ivan Demidov ...' ['It's me — the words formed slowly in his head — me, Ivan Demidov ...'] (*FHUS*, 29) The scene also follows the logic of the mirror stage because, like the child who experiences a discrepancy between the image of unity and harmony, and the reality of incoordination, fragmentation and insufficiency, Ivan is astonished by his unexpected maturity: 'ce jeune visage qu'il n'avait pas vu depuis si longtemps — ce jeune visage légèrement bleui par l'ombre de la première barbe, avec des sourcils décolorés par le soleil et des yeux terriblement lointains, étrangers.' ['the face that he had not seen for such a long time — this young face slightly blue with the shadow of its first beard, the eyebrows bleached by the sun and devastatingly distant, alien eyes.'] (*FHUS*, 29) Further, the two adjectives qualifying the protagonist's eyes — distant and strange — appear to foretell Ivan's future alienation from himself in language, which, in Lacanian terms, means that we always speak the Other's discourse. In *La Fille*, this alienation, as I will argue later, pertains to Ivan's position in relation to the

66 Adele Barker, 'Women without Men in the Writing of Contemporary Soviet Women', in *Russian Literature and Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Daniel Rancour-Laferrière (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company), pp. 431–50, (431–32).

67 Jacques Lacan, 'Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du *Je* telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique', in *Écrits*, vol. 1 (Paris: Seuil, 1999), pp. 92–9.

propagandist version of World War II, which gradually — and tragically — steals away from the protagonist his own memories, as Demidov first internalises and then himself disseminates it.

The Lacanian interpretation of the pool episode is additionally invited by the presence of a mirror in two other scenes that relate, firstly, Ivan's injury and, secondly, his reception of the Stalingrad documentary, the television screen acting as, in Clément's words, 'le miroir cathodique' ['the cathodic mirror'].⁶⁸ Before returning to the Stalingrad documentary, I will focus on the novel's opening sequence which narrates Ivan's *birth* as the novel's hero and which, chronologically, is posterior to the protagonist's becoming a Hero of the Soviet Union at Stalingrad. The scene takes place on a battlefield strewn with corpses and injured soldiers, and shows a team of medics searching for survivors. Having noticed Ivan's heroic status, a nurse decides to disregard the obvious signs of death — the puddle of frozen blood surrounding the man's head, glassy and bulging eyes, eyelids distended by an explosion and muddied with earth — and instead uses other means to evaluate the soldier's condition. If Makine depicts it as dictated by the veneration of those bearing the Gold Star,⁶⁹ on the symbolic level the nurse's perseverance brings to mind the ancient Greek myth of the hero's physical quasi-indestructibility or the idea — equally ancient Greek — that immortality can be gained through dying and coming back to life. Like Odysseus, Heracles or Perseus, who all return from their voyage to the Underworld,⁷⁰ Ivan survives a set of seemingly fatal injuries, as well as postwar hardship and political violence. By the same token, later in the novel he suffers only relatively benign consequences of his reprehensible behaviour, and it is only once deprived of his heroic status that he loses his extraordinary invulnerability.

An alternative way of looking at the novel's opening episode is in relation to the mirror's ego-building potential stipulated by Lacan, the two scenes — the pool episode and the battlefield scene — being connected by the motif of the mirror as well as by that of nature. Before becoming clouded by Ivan's breath, the nurse's pocket mirror reflects the sky and a hoarfrost-covered hedge, amazingly intact. The horrific devastation brought about by senseless fighting is thus once again set against nature's constant quality and beauty, symbolised by the crisp wintry landscape. Additionally, the sky, read intratextually, implies the man's communion with the universe or with distant human

68 Clément, 'Idéalisation et désacralisation d'un héros', p. 35. My own translation.

69 *Ibidem*, p. 25.

70 Harold Bloom, *Homer's The Odyssey* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007), p. 27.

beings in the face of her/his own existential solitude.⁷¹ The presence of the sky in the mirror, from which, curiously, the reflection of Ivan's face is missing, can also communicate the protagonist's absence from the world of the living, to which he will miraculously return a few days later. If in Makine's writing nature is maternally invested, so is the figure of the nurse who, as imagined by the Franco-Russian author, treads the fine line between maternal solicitude and eroticism.⁷² Like a mother who places her child before the mirror so that it can be lured with a promise of independence and full motor control at the moment when it still perceives itself as a fragmented body, the nurse helps, so it seems, Ivan triumph over bodily disintegration by using her pocket mirror. The unifying power of the looking-glass is reinforced by the mutilated or dead bodies surrounding the protagonist during and after the war, a theme that will be fully explored in the next chapter. As he is recovering in hospital, Ivan shares a room with a lieutenant who has had both his legs amputated and whose injury helps him to conceptualise his own sense of wholeness: '[Ivan] était resté vivant, ses jambes et ses bras étaient intacts' ['[Ivan] was still alive, his legs and arms were intact'] (*FHUS*, 16). Likewise, at Stalingrad, the protagonist returns from the forest to face his severely injured comrades: Sergei, who got hit in the stomach, and Lagun, who through a fault in his machine gun lost all of his digits but his thumbs. The war's brutality thus evokes the scenes of torment and torture painted by Hieronymus Bosch and used by Lacan as a visual reference in his discussion of the nightmares suffered by his patients. For Lacan, Bosch's visions of hell are but an expression of an anxiety associated with the bodily disarray predating the mirror stage, just as are social rituals such as tattooing, circumcision or piercing; children's games that are often marked by corporeal violence; and fantasies and dreams that proliferate with '[d]es images de castration, d'éviration, de mutilation, de démembrement, de dislocation, d'éventrement, de dévoration, d'éclatement du corps, bref [avec des] *imagos du corps morcelé*.' ['images of castration, mutilation, dismemberment,

71 Cf. *L'Homme inconnu* whose central protagonists, Volsky and Mila, promise each other to glance once a day at the sky as a way of communicating during their separation. Even after Mila's death Volsky sticks with this ritual that helps him to survive his long gulag sentence, a debilitating illness and, finally, the onslaught of capitalism that erases the memory of World War II.

72 Cf. Charlotte Lemonnier (*Le Testament*), the orphanage nurse and Alexandra (*Jacques Dorme*), or Alexei Berg's unnamed frontline lover who is also a nurse (*La Musique*).

dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body, in short, the *imagos* [...] of the fragmented body.’]⁷³

Pursuing the Lacanian logic, Makine’s choice to situate the makeshift hospital where Ivan convalesces in a school building seems only appropriate. Like a young child undergoing socialisation and entering language, Ivan learns to walk again and gradually takes stock of his body, heroic status and environment. The infant’s passage from what Lacan calls the circle of the *Innenwelt* (inner-world) into the *Umwelt* (outer-world) that, importantly, the French psychoanalyst does not see as static but endows with a temporal dimension,⁷⁴ in *La Fille* finds its reflection in Ivan’s contemplation of Darwin’s portrait and a map of the world suspended on the walls of this classroom-cum-hospital ward. The two images indicate Ivan’s entry into the realms of time and space, the reference to the English naturalist and his evolutionary theory confirming the *Umwelt*’s dynamic aspect. These visual references also indicate the godlessness of Soviet Russia where faith has been placed in materialist science and where, as evidenced by Ivan’s recovery, it is the fittest who survive. As implied by the novel’s semi-divine protagonist, here history is viewed in terms of the evolution of species that always moves towards greater complexity until god-like perfection has been attained,⁷⁵ which, in the Soviet context, corresponds to the metanarrative conceiving of communism as the end of history. And as for the map of the world, the three colours dominating it — the red for the Soviet Union, the green for the British colonies and the purple for the dominions of France — anticipate the USSR’s new position as a powerful state equal to the old colonial empires, a position that Ivan’s homeland earned with its decisive role in World War II.

Ivan’s War(s)

As well as acting as a metaphor of Ivan’s rebirth as a fully-fledged Soviet citizen, the little pool episode serves to articulate the idea of private remembrance, as opposed to the state-fabricated image of Russia’s struggle against Germany. Central to *La Fille*, the theme of the conflict between individual and official

73 Jacques Lacan, ‘L’Agressivité en psychanalyse’, in *Écrits*, pp. 101–24. This and all the following translations of the questions from *Écrits* come from *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977).

74 Lacan, ‘Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je’, p. 96.

75 Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 130.

memory runs through the whole of Makine's oeuvre whose protagonists' personal and frequently highly traumatic war experience is inevitably muted by the myth of the Great Victory. To quote some examples: Pavel of *Requiem* is particularly marked by a rust-coloured dog wounded by shrapnel; Alexei of *La Musique* stays perturbed by the sight of a squirrel tormented to death by restless soldiers; and Volsky of *L'Homme inconnu* forever reminisces about a handful of wild strawberries he picked in a rush before re-joining the column of soldiers. Like his successors, who hardly get a chance to share their private frontline memories, Ivan will never speak openly — at least not in the way he would wish to — about the moment when he glimpsed his reflection in the surface of water. By positing the little pool episode as Ivan's most marking wartime memory and as more effective in preserving and transmitting knowledge about the past than official historiography, Makine's novel once again confirms its allegiance to the current of historiographic metafiction. This is because the latter, in Hutcheon's words, questions the personal responsibility for public history, speculates about historical displacement and asks itself what constitutes the 'known facts' about any given historical event.⁷⁶ Having said that, for Hutcheon the displacement of public consciousness by private memory does not mean the expansion of the subjective view of history, but rather a deliberate complication of the border between private and historical, and between public and biographical.⁷⁷ This, as we will see in the remaining part of this chapter, is also illustrated by Ivan's story that interlaces the two types of memory.

In *La Fille* the confusion between the received image of the war and the soldier's firsthand experience is foregrounded as of the novel's opening scene that, unmistakably resonating with Tolstoyan echoes, describes Ivan's initial impression of the front. The protagonist's musings invoke those of Pierre Bezukhov who, contemplating the battlefield at Borodino, expects something that looks like a set piece or a historical painting of a battlefield, but instead finds a confusion of human bodies.⁷⁸ Similarly, Demidov is dismayed at the messy reality that hardly corresponds to his text-based knowledge of war:

[I]l imaginait des soldats soigneusement alignés dans l'herbe tendre, comme s'ils avaient eu le temps, avant de mourir, de prendre une pose

⁷⁶ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 94.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 94.

⁷⁸ Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History* (New York: Simon and Schuster), p. 18.

particulière, significative, suggérée par la mort. Chaque cadavre apparaissait ainsi dans la solitude de sa rencontre singulière avec la mort. Et l'on pouvait jeter un regard sur le visage de chacun d'eux, l'un tournant ses yeux vers les nuages qui s'éloignaient lentement, l'autre touchant de sa joue la terre noire.

[[He] used to picture [...] soldiers carefully lined up on the fresh grass, as if, before dying, they had all had time to adopt a particular significant posture, one suggested by death. In this way each corpse would be perceived in its isolation of its own unique encounter with mortality. And each of their faces could be studied, this one with its eyes uplifted towards the clouds, as they drifted slowly away, this one pressing his cheek against the black earth.]

FHUS, 11–12

Contrary to Ivan's expectations, the battlefield turns out to be a stretch of muddy grass piled high with greatcoats and bodies which, massacred by the fighting, are often beyond recognition. Rather than being neatly separated, Russian and German corpses are, to Demidov's surprise, mingled together, their faces down against the earth, which suggests both the irrelevance of nationality and a loss of individual identity in death. If the protagonist's essentially Christian refusal to treat the dead according to their nationality and his compassion for the enemy make him a quintessentially Makinean hero, it sets *La Fille* apart from Tarkovsky's film, whose central character continues to be driven by his hatred for the Germans. In this scene, Ivan appears to perceive the Nazis as equally human as his fellow Russians, and as equally victimised by the regime that sent them to death.

Just as it fails to match earlier textual representations of wartime reality, Ivan's frontline experience proves incompatible with the wartime and post-war narrative about the Eastern Front. This incompatibility is instantiated by the protagonist's memory of his own recruitment, which differs from its representation by the media. In a postwar documentary the commentator's confident voice states that '[a]près le défilé, les soldats partaient directement au front. [...] Et chacun emportait dans son cœur les paroles inoubliables du Chef suprême des armées: "Notre cause est juste! La victoire sera à nous!"' '[f]ollowing this parade, soldiers went straight to the front. [...] And each of them carried in his heart the unforgettable words of the Supreme Commander of the armies: "Our cause is just! Victory will be ours!"'] (*FHUS*, 112) The propagandist images of the time indeed suggested young men squaring off for

immediate combat, as if, in Merridale's words, 'they were ready to grab the nearest German by the scruff and throw him out of Russia straightaway'.⁷⁹ In reality, however, there were no barracks, food, transport or entertainment for the volunteers who aimlessly wondered, often drunk, in the streets of Moscow, or slept rough at railway stations, as if waiting for trains to take them to the front.⁸⁰ This is also how Ivan's memory has preserved the day he volunteered: the recruits, among whom were many uncouth peasants wearing padded jackets, dishevelled *shapkas* and down-at-heel boots, were kept waiting for many hours in a muddy courtyard, in snow and icy cold, accompanied by a general sense of uncertainty about their immediate future. Significantly, Ivan's memory of the day is accompanied by the popular melody *Yablochko* (little apple), played by a country lad on a *garmoshka* (button accordion), to which a sailor furiously danced in trampled snow. Given the association between music and tacit rebellion against the absurdity and cruelty of the Soviet system, History or fate, established by Makine's oeuvre,⁸¹ the presence of music in this scene suggests the soldiers' hopefulness, need of beauty, and sense of relative freedom that they experience within the very narrow constraints of their situation as they are being sent to near certain death.⁸² Needless to say, in contrast to the official account of recruitment, which is thoroughly impersonal, Ivan's thoughts go out to the *garmoshka*-player and the sailor as, reminiscing about the day years later, he asks himself the quasi-rhetorical question concerning the two men's fortunes.

The clash between Ivan's memories and the official record is yet more starkly illustrated with the account of the battle of Stalingrad, for which Demidov received the Gold Star of the Hero of the Soviet Union. Ironically, all Ivan saw of the 'hero city' was a streak of black smoke on the horizon and, as for the river Volga, he only glimpsed 'un vide grisâtre au loin, comme suspendu sur l'abîme au bout de la terre' ['a greyish void in the distance, as if poised above the abyss at the end of the world'] (*FSHU*, 26). Yet, when questioned by a journalist about his impression of Stalingrad or of the mighty river flowing through it, Demidov refuses to let on that his experience fails to match the public's expectations. His evasiveness recalls another Tolstoyan character, Nicolai

79 Merridale, *Ivan's War*, p. 93.

80 *Ibidem*, p. 94.

81 Helena Duffy, 'On connaît la musique: La vie culturelle au temps du siège de Leningrad dans *La Vie d'un homme inconnu* d'Andreï Makine', *Lublin Studies in Modern Languages and Literature*, 39.1 (2015), 142–62.

82 For an analysis of the theme of 'little apple' (*yablochko*), which, as mentioned in Chapter 1, also features in *Le Testament*, see Garfitt.

Rostov, who 'knew by experience that men always lie when describing military exploits, as he himself had done when recounting them; besides that, he had experience enough to know that nothing happens in the war as we imagine or relate it.'⁸³ Similarly, being centred on death and suffering, Demidov's memories of the breakthrough battle hardly correspond to the propagandist narrative that invariably emphasises Stalingrad's heroic side: '[Les soldats soviétiques] ont contenu l'avance de l'ennemi dans une direction d'une importance stratégique capitale [et] ont résisté à plus de dix attaques d'un ennemi numériquement supérieur.' ['[Soviet soldiers] contained the enemy's advance in a direction of vital strategic importance [and] resisted more than ten attacks by a numerically superior enemy.'] (*FHUS*, 30) To counter the report's impersonal and totalising ring, in his mind Ivan scrupulously names his fallen and injured comrades: Sergeant Mikhalych, who got shot in the chest 'en portant la main à la sa poitrine comme pour en arracher un petit éclat griffu' ['clapping his hand to his chest, as if to pluck a tiny, jagged sliver of shrapnel'] (*FHUS*, 26–27); Sergei, whose stomach suddenly turned into 'une bouille sanguinolente' ['a bloody mess'] (*FHUS*, 28); or the old Siberian machine gunner with mutilated hands. Yet, whenever interviewed, Ivan misses his chance to slip in a word about Mikhalych 'qui ne connaîtra jamais ses petits enfants' ['who would never know his grandchildren'], Seryozha, 'à l'air si serein et si insouciant dans la mort' ['who looked so serene, so carefree in death'] or Lagun, 'qui n'avait plus qu'un doigt à chaque main' ['who had only one digit left on each hand'] (*FHUS*, 59).

Apart from both accentuating the war's tragic facet and rendering it more personal, like many contemporary war novels⁸⁴ and, more generally, postmodern literature that challenges the separation of order and chaos, and demystifies our effort to structure chaos by imparting meaning,⁸⁵ *La Fille* articulates the confusion characteristic of the war experience. Contrary to the afore-cited description of Stalingrad and exemplifying postmodernism's acceptance of ambiguity and confusion,⁸⁶ as well as its tendency to question the very basis of any certainty, including the historical one,⁸⁷ Ivan's own recollection focuses on the mayhem reigning on the battlefield and stresses the disordered, fragmented and uncertain character of human memory. Like Rostov, who at Austerlitz is

83 Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. by Louise and Aylmer Maude (London: Brighthouse, 1942), p. 893.

84 de Groot, p. 106.

85 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 7.

86 *Ibidem*, p. 50.

87 *Ibidem*, p. 57.

unsure of what is happening and why, Demidov wonders how he and his comrades found themselves on the high ground between a sparse woodland and a ravine, why they had been left there on their own and, finally, who, if anyone at all, had given the order to occupy this position. If with this passage Makine implicitly criticises the organisation of the Soviet armed forces, the extract also reflects the typical difficulty of recollecting combat that Merridale describes as 'a moment of extreme emergency and stress [as well as] an episode of fractured, collapsed time, when the seconds drag slowly and entire hours speed by.'⁸⁸ Consequently, 'the scenes and feelings that relate to combat turn out to be evanescent traces, quickly lost.'⁸⁹

In any case, rather than with fighting, for Ivan Stalingrad is synonymous with the little pool episode, even if, before being interviewed for the documentary, he never gets a chance to divulge it. His silence over it does not mean, however, that he does not wish to talk about it; on the contrary, each time he speaks to schoolchildren he is tempted to mention it, yet the carefully staged performance where the teacher, the speaker and the audience all go through the motions, leaves no room for spontaneous reminiscences. And so the teacher, who, as Ivan is surprised to realise, is too young to remember the war, invokes the twenty million lives sacrificed for the sake of the pupils' radiant future, a figure that, in Tumarkin's words, 'came to represent a set store of redemptive suffering that the Brezhnev regime called upon again and again as evidence of the country's unique position in world history.'⁹⁰ Another cliché the young woman utters is the line from Berggolts's poem, whose ironic significance and potential to capture the Soviet state's hypocritical policy on war memory I explained in this book's introduction. Paradoxically, Ivan's scepticism about his school visits will not, as I will discuss later, prevent him from internalising the propagandist discourse on the war and from using it to teach the young generation and foreign tourists a lesson in patriotism.

It is when interviewed for the film about Stalingrad, made to commemorate the battle's fortieth anniversary, that Ivan finally manages to mention his most

88 Catherine Merridale, 'Culture, Ideology and Combat in the Red Army, 1939–1945', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42.2 (2006), 305–24 (p. 308).

89 *Idem*.

90 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 135. Stalin's original assessment was between seven and eight million. In the 1950s the figure was corrected to seventeen million and in 1961 Khrushchev spoke of twenty million. In fact, as Merridale states, 'the total appears to have been at least as high as twenty-eight million, while some current Russian estimates inflate the losses to thirty-seven or even forty million.' Catherine Merridale, 'Death and Memory in Modern Russia', *History Workshop Journal*, 42 (Autumn 1996), 1–18 (p. 6).

memorable experience. Before I examine the way Demidov's story is stolen from him and exploited for political ends by the documentary's makers, it is worth returning to Makine's already-mentioned critical attitude towards cinema, which *La Ville-Héros sur la Volga* clearly corroborates. Already appreciated by Lenin and Trotsky in Russia, or Goebbels in Germany, and hence exploited by both the Soviet and the Nazi regimes,⁹¹ the propagandist value of cinema has been theorised by, among others, historian Robert Rosenstone. Although in a documentary images appear on the screen unmediated, it is still a work 'consciously shaped into a narrative that [...] creates the meaning of the material being conveyed.'⁹² This means that what we are watching is a selection of images carefully arranged into sequences to tell a story or to make an argument.⁹³ And, while a documentary does so to a lesser degree than a historical feature film, it still, contends Rosenstone, 'structures material into the conventions of drama, with a story that begins with certain problems, questions, and/or characters at the outset, develops their complications over time, and resolves them by the end of the film.'⁹⁴ Similarly, Richard Raack observes that while censorship is one obvious reason for film's unreliability,⁹⁵ another is the manipulation to which films can be as easily subjected, this being evidenced by 'edited films in which whole newsreel stories and substantial parts of documentary films have been manufactured out of totally irrelevant stock shots.'⁹⁶ Relating more specifically to Russian cinematography, Boym argues that, although 'documentary mythology' may sound like an oxymoron, documentary and myth are in fact inseparable, especially in Russia where the border between history and fiction has traditionally been blurred.⁹⁷ Boym's contention is supported by the documentaries featured in Makine's oeuvre, which, theoretically, should possess an indexical relationship to reality,⁹⁸ but which are evidently designed to score political goals. I will thus now demonstrate that *La Ville-Héros sur la*

91 See Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1998).

92 Robert A. Rosenstone, 'History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History into Film', *The American Historical Review*, 93.5 (December 1988), 1173–185 (p. 1179).

93 *Ibidem*, p. 1180.

94 Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 71.

95 R. C. Raack, 'Historiography as Cinematography: A Prolegomenon to Film Work for Historians', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 18.3 (July 1983), 411–38 (p. 422).

96 *Ibidem*, p. 421.

97 Boym, *Common Places*, p. 240.

98 Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, p. 70.

Volga endorses the description of a historical documentary as ‘always positioned, ideological, and partisan’,⁹⁹ its ideological objectives being, firstly, the promulgation of the war cult; secondly, the incitement of hostility towards the West; thirdly, the promotion of the USSR’s moral superiority; and, finally, the representation of Soviet Russia as the leader in the ‘struggle for peace’.

La Ville-Héros sur la Volga opens with an image of war veterans who, confused and described as ‘ombres du passé’ [‘ghosts from the past’], wander around gigantic concrete memorial monuments (*FHUS*, 73). The scene tells us that the experience of individual soldiers has been dwarfed by the war cult, as expressed through grandiose memorial complexes, monuments, battle panoramas and paintings.¹⁰⁰ As ‘icons in a cunning, but also self-deceiving process of choosing the past one can bear to remember and consigning the rest — the undignified sorrow, the shameful suffering — to oblivion’,¹⁰¹ these sites were, according to Ignatieff, as much about remembering as about forgetting. The camera then focuses on retired generals squeezed into tight uniforms and comfortable in their *datchas* in the capital’s outskirts or in their spacious Moscow apartments. It is in their reminiscences that Ivan’s story is embedded, a fact that illustrates the emergence under Brezhnev of private testimonies that nevertheless remained subject to strict censorship and had to fit in with the official discourse on the war.¹⁰² To fulfil its second objective, namely to expose the Westerners’ neglect for World War II memory while portraying the West as a locus of stark economic inequalities, the next sequence shows a Parisian street where the camera rapidly moves from gleaming shop windows to a huddled *clochard*. The authors of the documentary control the Soviet audience also by meticulously leaving any ethnic minorities off-screen, as their presence would, in their mind, undermine the film’s credibility. Most importantly, the film represents Westerners, for whom ‘Stalingrad’ is a metro station deprived of any deeper historical resonance, as historically ignorant. In contrast, the Soviet people’s commitment to the war legacy is visible in both state-sponsored commemorations and the privileged position as moral guides of the likes of Demidov, ‘ce modeste héros “qui sauva le monde de la peste brune”’ [‘this modest hero “who saved the world from the brown plague”’] (*FHUS*, 74).

99 David Ludvigsson, *The Historian-Filmmaker’s Dilemma: Historical Documentaries in Sweden in the Era of Hager and Villius* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2003). Quoted by Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, p. 70.

100 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, pp. 138–45.

101 Ignatieff, p. 158.

102 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, pp. 178–85.

Indeed, despite his lacklustre job of a lorry driver, Ivan is shown talking to schoolchildren and journalists.

To substantiate its deliberately misleading narrative, the film uses historical evidence, including original footage or artefacts such as the Gold Star that authenticates Demidov's heroic status, a spread-out copy of *Pravda* that testifies to his adherence to communist ideology, or yellowing photographs as proof of Ivan's happy postwar existence. But, when regarded later from Olya's perspective, the same photos will testify to her parents' miserable life. And this is not only materially, for Ivan's muzzle-like sandals and Tatyana's evident efforts to hide her disfigured hand from the camera metaphorise the couple's inability to be candid about their wartime experience. By opposing the two readings of the same photograph, Makine voices his typically postmodern scepticism of evidence-based history, exposing the ease with which sources can be subjected to multiple interpretations and manipulated for political reasons.

Returning to the documentary, it ends with an apotheosis: the camera returns to the gigantic monument to the Mother Country and traces the rebirth of Stalingrad-Volgograd that, Phoenix-like, rises from its ruins. Then, finally, the viewers can see Khrushchev deliver a speech about the USSR's 'struggle for peace'. The film's final aim is hence to exploit the war in order to strengthen Russia's image as a model polity, both ideologically and morally, and as a purveyor of peace,¹⁰³ although in reality at the time the Soviet Union was instigating and waging wars in all four corners of the globe.¹⁰⁴

It is therefore hardly surprising that Ivan cannot claim his own reflection in the icon of Soviet heroism presented by the documentary.¹⁰⁵ In an ironic *mise en abîme*, he declares his inability to identify with his televised image at the very moment when on the screen he is reminiscing about failing to recognise himself in his reflection in the water's surface. Thus, just as the face of a battle-hardened soldier mirrored by the water's surface did not match the image of a young and inexperienced country lad that Ivan had kept of himself, the protagonist's heroic portrait mirrors neither his wartime experience nor his humdrum postwar existence. This is largely because Ivan's key frontline memory is stolen from him by the paternalistic and didactic voice-over that translates a simple story into a grandiloquent tale of patriotic zeal, shamelessly distorting its meaning:

103 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 150.

104 *Idem*. Tumarkin explains that the catchphrase 'struggle for peace' was a euphemism for Russia's interest in reducing the cost of the arms build-up.

105 Clément, 'Idéalisation et désacralisation d'un héros', p. 25.

La terre natale ... La terre de la patrie ... C'est elle qui rendait ses forces au soldat fatigué, c'est elle qui, avec une sollicitude toute maternelle, lui insufflait vaillance et bravoure. C'est dans cette source intarissable que le combattant soviétique puisait sa joie vivifiante, la haine sacrée de l'ennemi, la foi inébranlable en la Victoire ...

[The native soil ... the soil of the Mother Country ... this was what gave strength to the weary soldier, this was the truly maternal care that nurtured his courage and bravery. It was from this inextinguishable well-spring that the Soviet fighter drew his reviving joy, the sacred hatred of the enemy, the unshakable faith in Victory ...]

FHUS, 81

The double discrepancy between reality and representation, which reflects the inherent and inescapable incompatibility between historical reality and its textualisations, is further underlined by Makine's choice to intercalate the description of Ivan's reception of the documentary with that of his wife's death in a food queue. This simultaneously cruel and ironic counterpoint to the documentary conveys, firstly, the contrast between the official representation of the Soviet Union as a paradise on earth and the economic hardship suffered by ordinary citizens. Secondly, the state-sponsored reverence of war memory clashes with the popular attitude towards World War II, as Soviet society has now become preoccupied with new wars and their victims. (This shift of emphasis from the Great Fatherland War to more recent conflicts is confirmed by Ivan's succession at the school by a young veteran of Afghanistan.) Communicated by the death of Tatyana, who is trampled by shoppers jealous of the veterans' meagre privileges, the overall message of this episode is that the nascent consumer society no longer respects those who fought in World War II.

Crucially, Tatyana dies when a piece of shrapnel, lodged in her chest since the war and dormant despite two childbirths and heavy work at a furniture factory, damages her heart. It is beyond all doubt that the offensive object symbolises the heroine's private wartime reminiscences which, like her husband's, gravitate around death and violence, but which gradually become colonised by a more cheerful narrative. Tatyana remembers, for example, the death of her colleague, Manya, burnt alive in a van blown up by a mine, or the double rape and murder committed by a *polizei*.¹⁰⁶ It needs pointing out that with the scene depicting two young women being shot and then, their bodies still

¹⁰⁶ The *polizei* was most likely a member of the *Ukrainische Hilfspolizei* (Ukrainian Auxiliary Police) established by the Germans during their occupation of Ukraine.

writhing, being sexually assaulted, Makine addresses, however succinctly, the prickly questions of rape and collaboration committed by Soviet people. However, while attaching both crimes to Ukrainians rather than Russians, he conveniently posits rape as the fact of a collaborator and not of a Soviet soldier. In any case, as time passes Tatyana allows these images to be overwritten by happier ones, which she then further embellishes for the benefit of her avid audience. Having slipped into the role of a Hero's wife, she enjoys telling and retelling the story of her wartime rendezvous with Demidov and, although those took place during an icy spring, in a dusty hospital courtyard, against the black carcass of a burnt-out roof, a bench with peeling paint and a hungry cat sliding along beside the fence, Tatyana concentrates on blossoming apple trees. In her philosophical question — 'La guerre, qu'est-ce que ça peut leur faire, aux pommiers?' ['So what do apple trees care about war?'] (*FHUS*, 22) — we can recognise another allusion to *War and Peace* where, watching two peasant girls stealing green plums from his orchard, Andrew Bolkonsky ruminates on the relativity of his own experience and the subjectivity of his point of view.¹⁰⁷ In the end, Tatyana confuses fact and fancy to the point of taking her romanticised version of events for reality: 'Il lui semblait maintenant qu'ils ont vraiment eu ces rendez-vous et ces soirées longues, si longues ...' ['It seems to her now that they really did have those meetings and long, long evenings together ...'] (*FHUS*, 22)

Speak, Memory

Like those of his wife, Ivan's frontline memories are eventually submerged by the collective awareness of the past shaped from above. If this phenomenon is also found in other cultural contexts where distant personal memory proves inaccurate as it is distorted by contemporary public memory,¹⁰⁸ it seems that in Soviet and post-Soviet reality the separating of the state-managed version of the war from its survivors' everyday memory has proven particularly difficult. This is because, according to Kirschenbaum, '[t]he Soviet state's "monopoly of significant ideas" left little room for purely personal responses to the losses of war or for competing "myths" even as official monuments and myths drew their legitimacy from their recognition and representation of personal grief.'¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, p. 975.

¹⁰⁸ Markwick, '“A Sacred Duty”', p. 403.

¹⁰⁹ Lisa Kirschenbaum, 'Gender, Memory, and National Myths: Ol'ga's Berggol'ts and the Siege of Leningrad', *Nationalities Papers*, 28.3 (2000), 551–64 (p. 551).

That this is precisely Ivan's case is evidenced by the following extract discussing the confusion between the protagonist's personal and public memory:

Parfois Ivan était surpris de constater que lui-même oubliait de plus en plus la guerre. Il ne parvenait plus à distinguer ses souvenirs anciens des récits pour les écoliers qu'il avait cent fois ressassés et des interviews aux journalistes. Et lorsqu'il évoquait un jour un détail qui passionnait les garçons [...], il pensait: 'Mais est-ce que c'était vraiment comme ça? Je l'ai lu peut-être dans les Mémoires du maréchal Joukov ...'

[Sometimes Ivan was surprised to realise that even he was increasingly forgetful about the war. He could no longer distinguish between his old memories from the tales told to schoolchildren and the interviews given to journalists. And when one day he was evoking a detail that fascinated the boys [...], he thought: 'But was it really like that? Maybe it is something I read in Marshall Zhukov's memoirs ...']

FHUS, 60

The conflation of Ivan's memories with the mythologised version of the past means that once the war cult begins to be dismantled in the spirit of *glasnost*, he struggles to square his experience — or rather what he has become accustomed to take for his experience — with the emerging revelations. However critical Makine's debut novel may be of the cult of the Great Victory, Demidov's demise brings into sharp relief the ramifications of its debunking for a generation brought up with, to borrow Tumarkin's formulation, 'the sonorous combination of self-pity and self-congratulation'.¹¹⁰ Having been ruthlessly exploited by wartime and postwar regimes that concocted and upheld the myth, Ivan has now fallen victim to the Gorbachev administration that encouraged a revision of Soviet history.

It is already during the Thaw, that is long before personal testimonies of the front began emerging, that Ivan's conception of the war is dealt the first blow. As part of Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation, revelations were made about the generalissimo's cowardice and strategic mistakes, and the merit for the Victory was shifted from the Great Leader's genius to the Party, the Red Army and the whole Soviet nation.¹¹¹ What it meant in practice was that Stalin's statues, busts and portraits were removed from public spaces, and Stalingrad was renamed

¹¹⁰ Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 188.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 108–9.

Volgograd.¹¹² Both these facts find their reflection in Makine's debut novel, where Ivan learns from Khrushchev's memoirs about Stalin's incompetence as a military leader. This makes him question his earlier reverential image of the generalissimo and his correlated trust in the contemporaneous narrative, according to which '[Stalin] a organisé la lutte ... il a tracé la stratégie de la victoire ...' ['[Stalin] organised the struggle ... He drew up strategy for victory ...'] (*FHUS*, 111) Demidov then compares the revisionist accounts of recruitment with his own memory of his regiment being reviewed by Stalin before going off to the front. At the time, the God-like figure of the Father of the Peoples — calm, motionless and unshakeable — made an unforgettable impression upon Ivan and his comrades: 'À sa vue quelque chose de presque animal tressaille en chacun d'eux. Chacun d'eux se croit regardé par lui au fond des yeux.' ['At the sight of him something almost animal thrills in each of them. Each of them believes Stalin is looking deeply into his eyes.'] (*FHUS*, 112) The free indirect focalisation through Ivan and his fellow draftees used in this extract abolishes the gap between the authorial narrator's perspective and Demidov's youthful naivety, which means that the two positions are collapsed into nostalgia for Stalin and the USSR's wartime past. This lack of distance between the narratorial statement and the protagonist's thoughts incites our sympathy for Ivan whose idol is being desecrated. The same narrative strategy is at work in the passage relating the thoughts of Demidov's colleague, a war veteran himself, which he voices as he and Ivan pull down Stalin's statue:

Des fois, on était aplati en première ligne, tellement arrosés qu'on ne pouvait pas décoller la tête de la terre. Ça sifflait, ça crachait dru comme un arrosoir. Le commissaire politique saute sur ses jambes, avec son petit revolver [...] et a peine a-t-il crié: 'Pour la Patrie, pour Staline, en avant!'... et ça nous a arrachés, nom de Dieu! On sautait et on courait ...

[Sometimes, we were lying there on our bellies at the front and they were chucking so much at us you couldn't even lift up your head from the ground. The stuff was whistling over. A hail of bullets like a shower. Then the political commissar jumps to his feet, with his little revolver, you know, like those kids' pistols. [...] And once he yells: 'For our Country, for Stalin, forward!' ... then it grabbed us, you know, God damn it! Up we jumped and went over the top ...]

FHUS, 55

112 *Ibidem*, p. 109.

Likewise, it is hard to detect any ironic distance between the narrator's and the protagonist's positions when Ivan himself reminisces about Stalin's inspirational power during the battle of Moscow:

Staline! Et tout de suite une bouffée de chaleur. Pour lui, pour la Patrie, on pouvait affronter les chars à mains nues! Pour Staline, tout prenait son sens: et les tranchées enneigées, et leurs capotes qui bientôt se figeraient pour toujours sous le ciel gris, et le cri rauque de l'officier s'élançant sous le claquement assourdissant des chenilles, sa grenade dégoupillée à la main.

[Stalin! And suddenly the temperature rose. For him, for their Country, they were ready to take on the tanks with their bare hands! For Stalin's sake it all made sense: the snow-filled trenches, their own greatcoats which would soon stiffen forever under the grey sky, and the officer's rough cry as he hurled himself beneath the deafening clatter of the tank tracks, his grenade in his hand, with the pin removed.]

FHUS, 25

Ivan's thoughts of the battle of Moscow are triggered by the newly-emerged information about *Panfilovtsy* who, as he learns, had no choice but to sacrifice themselves, any retreat having been prevented by the sinister NKVD units (*zagriadatelnye otriady*).¹¹³ In light of these revelations, the *politruk's* legendary exhortation to his troops — 'Russia is big, but there is no room to retreat to. Moscow is behind us' —,¹¹⁴ which he supposedly uttered as he flung himself under a tank, becomes deeply sarcastic, since it was not the presence of Russia's capital that motivated the twenty-eight men but its notorious secret police that, much better equipped than regular soldiers, would mow down anyone retreating, including the wounded.¹¹⁵ We are thus made to believe that until that moment Ivan hardly thought of Stalin's 'Not a step back' policy and

113 In 1942 the title of the Hero of the Soviet Union was conferred on the perished twenty-eight soldiers from Ivan Panfilov's Division, although, as a postwar investigation revealed, six of the men had survived. During the postwar era songs and poems were written about *Panfilovtsy*, and two films, including one that had its premiere in 2016, have been made about the heroic battle at Dubosekovo.

114 Originally these words were uttered by Marshall Zhukov during the battle of Moscow but were later ascribed to the political commissar Klochkov by a journalist at *Krasnaya Zvezda* who fabricated the *Panfilovtsy* story. Stephen G. Fritz, *Ostkrieg: Hitler's War of Extermination in the East* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), p. 186.

115 Merridale, *Ivan's War*, p. 89, and Gillespie, 'Defence of the Realm' (para. 6–10 of 39).

that it was indeed his patriotic ardour and veneration of the Great Leader that made him tear into battle:

‘Et pourtant’ — les mots s’articulaient silencieusement dans [l’]esprit [d’Ivan] — ‘je ne pensais pas à ce moment-là à la moindre équipe de barrage’. Le lieutenant a hurlé: “En avant pour Staline! Pour la Patrie!” Et d’un coup tout est parti. Plus de froid, plus de peur. On y croyait ...’

[‘And yet’ — the words form silently in his mind — ‘at that moment a thought of anti-retreat forces never occurred to me. The lieutenant shouted: “Advance! For Stalin! For our Country!” And in a flash it all went. No more cold, no more fear. We believed in it ...’]

FHUS, 26¹¹⁶

Makine’s wish to drown out any revisionist voices and to uphold the mythologised version of the war is already implied by a footnote regarding *Panfilovtsy* which never mentions the numerous attempts to refute the myth of the battle of Dubosekovo.¹¹⁷ Makine also has Ivan interrogate the validity of the emerging information by challenging the existence of an extra-textual reality and thus expressing what Charles Newman considers as the typically postmodern uncertainty and suspension of judgement:¹¹⁸ ‘Et puis [*sic*] va donc savoir comment cela s’est vraiment passé?’ [‘And who knows what really happened?’] (*FHUS*, 26) Yet, despite their apparently postmodern appearance, Ivan’s doubts are reactionary at heart, as by formulating them the protagonist tries to cling on to the version of events of which he has become a living monument. To Demidov’s advantage, one can add that his attitude is not untypical, the Soviet

116 Some wording here has been changed.

117 The 1948 Afanasyev report into the battle, recently declassified, already concluded that the clash at Dubosekovo had not happened and had been a fantasy. In the 1960s writer and combatant Emil Kardin published an article in the newspaper *Novyi Mir* about the fabrication of the *Panfilovtsy* legend. He argued that twenty-eight infantrymen could not have possibly halted fifty-four German tanks, and that the battle, which in fact had never taken place, was the invention of the self-serving journalists of the main newspaper of the armed forces, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Aleksander Krivitskii and Vasily Koroteev. See Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Alexander Statiev, “‘La Garde meurt mais ne se rend pas!’: Once Again on the 28 Panfilov Heroes”, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 13.4 (Autumn 2012), 769–98.

118 Charles Newman, *The Post-Modern Aura: The Act of Fiction in the Age of Inflation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1985), p. 201.

soldiers' conduct on the battlefield having little to do with the idealised version of that conduct propagated by the state and subsequently internalised by the veterans themselves. 'Many have', writes Merridale,

spent so long warming their hands at the official version of the Patriotic War that they cannot face the cold blasts of scepticism that blow in when the archive door is forced. The myth of the war is as important to some elderly survivors as the enhanced pensions that they used to receive. The communism they believed in has been discredited, the collectivism that provided for their health and welfare crumbled away. Inflation has slashed the value of their fixed incomes, while advertising, pornography and electronic media have destroyed their prim and enclosed world that sheltered them in middle age. The war, with its romance of heroic struggle, is all the treasure that some people have left. To question how it was is to threaten the last thing that allows them to make sense of their long lives.¹¹⁹

Like many of Merridale's respondents, Ivan is clearly an unreliable witness of wartime reality, yet instead of highlighting his unreliability the novel uses it to join the backlash against revisionist accounts of Russia's struggle against Hitler. That this is indeed Makine's objective is further substantiated by the fact that some of Demidov's frontline memories are disturbingly in tune with Soviet historiography, as exemplified by the image of girls throwing flowers at Soviet soldiers as they were passing through what the narrator calls 'des villes libérées' ['liberated towns'] (*FHUS*, 32). With this statement Makine both endorses the Red Army's official image as army-deliverer [*armya osvoboditel'nitsa*], created by Stalin as early as 1941, reaffirmed by Zhukov in 1945 and maintained until *perestroika*,¹²⁰ and indirectly denies well-known facts regarding Soviet troops' brutal treatment of women in the territories through which they marched on their way to Berlin. Rather than as a 'liberator', in countries that were to form the Eastern Bloc the Red Army was perceived as a conqueror, and the 'liberation' as a replacement of one foreign dictatorship with another.¹²¹

119 Merridale, 'Culture, Ideology and Combat in the Red Army, 1939–1945', pp. 307–8.

120 On 7 November 1941 Stalin made a speech in which he said: 'The enslaved people of Europe are looking upon you as their liberators. A great liberating mission stands before you. [...] The war you are waging is a war of liberation, a just war'. Quoted by Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 63 and p. 93.

121 In Poland's case, it meant not only a new enslavement but also a loss of the third of the country's prewar territory as the lands east of the river Bug were incorporated into

Moreover, in the areas through which they passed, Soviet troops systematically engaged in acts of violence against local populations, such as executions of partisans — or even civilians — mass rape and plunder. If the battles of Moscow and Stalingrad, argues Merridale, still belonged to the war of self-defence, once the Red Army crossed the former Polish-Russian border '[it] seemed capable of outrages that looked uncannily like those that their enemy had perpetrated in 1941. The wristwatches and bicycles and schnapps that brightened the road towards Berlin are well-documented'.¹²² Contrary to plunder, which was overtly encouraged as '[q]uotas of loot were set — so many kilos for each man per month — and looting was transformed into a duty',¹²³ murder and rape were taboo subjects. And yet, near the frontline women routinely suffered sexual violence, as evidenced by, among others, Merridale's investigation of the Soviet campaign: although death on the spot was the official punishment for murder or rape, women, be they young or old, German or Polish, were raped, mutilated and murdered,¹²⁴ while brutal killings and senseless destruction were a daily occurrence.¹²⁵

That, unlike rape, 'the pattern on a Meissen cup was a legitimate topic for man's letters home',¹²⁶ is reflected in *La Fille* whose protagonist boasts about his spoil consisting of several wristwatches, a quantity of Austrian shillings, some quality fabric and first-class leather. To mitigate Ivan's responsibility, Makine

the Soviet Union. Aleksandra Ziolkowska-Boehm, *The Polish Experience Through World War II: A Better Day Has Not Come* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), p. XIV.

122 Merridale, 'Culture, Ideology and Combat in the Red Army, 1939–1945', p. 320. See also Merridale, *Ivan's War*, p. 476.

123 The business of pillaging was so open that in Russia and Ukraine special depots were constructed to store the stolen goods until a horse and cart would take it to the soldier's village. Merridale, 'Culture, Ideology and Combat in the Red Army', p. 311.

124 Merridale notes that although the violence was worse in East Prussia 'rape was a problem wherever the Red Army encountered its enemies. Tens of thousands of German women and girls undoubtedly suffered rape at the hands of Soviet troops; the figure may well have reached hundreds of thousands'. Merridale, *Ivan's War*, p. 317.

125 Merridale, *Ivan's War*, p. 310. Merridale speaks of a 'violence on a scale that no one could have overlooked, and yet it disappeared from Soviet consciousness. Witnesses [...] were soon cast out, the German victims dismissed or silenced. It would take foreign observers, historians especially, to rediscover it, collect the testimonies, and to describe how, in some East Prussian towns, almost all the women were raped. [...] It did not matter [...] if the women were Germans or Poles, and thereby Russia's allies. It did not matter, either, if the women were young or old, for the women themselves were not the main object. The victims of the gang rapes were just meat, embodiments of Germany, all-purpose *Frauen*, recipients for Soviet and individual revenge.' (p. 312).

126 *Idem*.

states that his hero *found* some of these items in a ruined shop. Yet, even if they should have been stolen, the author largely justifies his protagonist's conduct by representing the Demidovs' postwar survival as entirely dependent on the looted goods. As for other, more serious transgressions, Ivan never mentions any, and it is, as already discussed, through Tatyana's story that the question of rape is, however obliquely and evasively, addressed.

From Berlin to *Beriozhka*

In his novels Makine not only avoids painful truths about Soviet soldiers' conduct during the war but also presents these truths as damaging for Russian society, and especially for those who themselves fought at the Eastern Front. In *La Fille* this detrimental effect of revisionist history is illustrated with Ivan's visit to the capital where he is once again taken advantage of, yet this time not by the state but by his own daughter. Eager to marry into Westernised Moscow bourgeoisie, Olya plans to introduce her father to her future parents-in-law and thus to offset the dishonourable nature of her work with Ivan's heroic status. Her scheme may have succeeded had it not been for Demidov's chance encounter with his former comrade, Sasha Semyonov, who opens the protagonist's eyes to the fact that Olya offers her charms to foreign diplomats and businessmen. In addition, Semyonov unveils before Ivan the authorities' heartless attitude towards war invalids, of which, having been sentenced to solitude and destitution by the poor quality of medical care Sasha received in wartime and thereafter, he is the prime example. Crucially, Demidov's awakening is staged against the celebrations of the fortieth anniversary of the Great Victory, which suddenly seem false. This is because if, on the one hand, the bombastic celebrations fail to reflect Semyonov's or even his own miserable postwar existence, on the other, they clash with Russia's Westernisation, which Olya emblematises and which is symptomatized by coachfuls of foreign tourists, youngsters sporting American brands, and *Beriozhka* shops selling foreign and quality Russian goods for hard currency. Having been indoctrinated into identifying the capitalist West as the heir of fascism,¹²⁷ Demidov can only see these developments as unwelcome. That it is the meeting with Semyonov which is instrumental in the change of Ivan's *Weltanschauung* transpires from the fact that on his arrival in Moscow the protagonist gladly plays the role of a Hero of the Soviet Union and enjoys the few modest privileges reserved for veterans (he buys theatre tickets without queuing, people give up seats for him

127 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 153.

in the metro). Conversely, after Sasha takes Ivan to a hotel where he catches a glimpse of his daughter in the company of a German, he begins to see the war cult as a sham. Demidov consequently feels angered at the sight of corpulent and bemedalled veterans who, as he guesses, must have spent the war lurking to the rear of the lines. Likewise, he is irked by the gigantic posters hailing the solidarity of soldiers, sailors and airmen, or by banners stating 'Vive le quarantième anniversaire de la Grande Victoire' ['Long live the fortieth anniversary of the Great Victory'] (*FHUS*, 168) or '1945–1985. Gloire au peuple soviétique victorieux!' ['1945–1985. Glory to the Victorious Soviet People!'] (*FHUS*, 169)

Yet, rather than at the Soviet authorities who exploited Ivan for decades, the protagonist points an accusatory finger at the Gorbachev administration and, by extension, at the West that he blames for Russia's loss of pride in its war-time past and its correlated renunciation of its erstwhile values. Voiced most poignantly in the scene showing Olya going to bed with Wilfried Almendinner, who, like Ivan, fought in the battle of Moscow but on the opposite side, the novel's criticism extends beyond the Soviet Union's former opponent. The French and Westernised Russians are also castigated, as instantiated by the negative portrait of Olya's first lover, a French athlete, who treats his Olympic success as a springboard for a lucrative career. Likewise, Olya's Francophile fiancé and future parents-in-law are openly ridiculed as snobbish and conceited, while the Parisians interviewed for the Stalingrad documentary are shown to be ignorant.¹²⁸ Unsurprisingly, those who embrace Western values are cruelly punished, as is Svetka, Olya's flatmate and colleague at the Trade Centre, who tirelessly diets and spins a hula-hoop in hope of adjusting her *matrioshka*-like figure to Western standards of feminine beauty promulgated by women's magazines. Her efforts, as well as her ever-growing stash of Western goods prove, however, worthless when her fiancé is killed in Afghanistan and her plans for a quasi-Western lifestyle vanish. Both Svetka's scorn for Russian way of living and her self-abuse are articulated with the detail of a half-*matrioshka* holding pencils on her desk. Broken up and misused, the symbolic embodiment of

128 While systematically representing Westerners as greedy, spiritually bankrupt, egoistic and shallow, *La Fille* shamelessly derides Blacks, Arabs and Asians. The journalists reporting from Paris set up their camera several hundred metres from the actual metro station as 'sur cette place on ne trouve pas un Français. Rien que des Noirs et des Arabes.' ['there is not a Frenchman to be found in the square. Nothing but Blacks and Arabs.'] (*FHUS*, 75) When one of Olya's fellow students at the Institute of Foreign Languages marries an African, which in any case she does solely to escape the Soviet Union, she overtly spurns her husband's ugliness.

Mother Russia¹²⁹ and of fertility is thus doubly destabilised, both communicating the corruption of Soviet society¹³⁰ and anticipating the Soviet Union's encroaching disintegration. The overall message of *La Fille*, which is indisputably Makine's most strongly anti-Western and racist novel, is therefore that Gorbachev allowed the Soviet people to neglect their wartime past by exposing Russia to Western influence. However, as evidenced by the presence of spies amongst Olya's clients, the West continues to try to undermine Russia, even if weapons have now been replaced with intelligence warfare.

To vent his anger and punish the treacherous and malevolent West, as well as those who opened up Russia to the onslaught of alien values, Ivan vandalises the very *Beriozhka* where, ironically, shortly after his outburst, Almendinner will purchase a bracelet to remunerate Olya's sexual services. Makine's choice to set the denouement of Ivan's tragedy in a hard currency store is doubly apt, the shop being, firstly, a metaphor of Olya's prostituting herself with Westerners and, secondly, a synecdoche for the sell-off of Russian culture. Already hinted at with Ivan's discovery that theatre tickets are now reserved mainly for foreigners, the latter fact is confirmed when in the *Beriozhka* Demidov watches a Swede purchase a *balalaika*, a symbol of traditional Russian culture that has now, like Olya's body, become a commodity. Establishing a parallel between the hard currency shop and his daughter's bed, Ivan yells at the staff: 'Allez, va, ma fille. Va [...] servir [les étrangers] [...]. Nous, il nous reste juste à les servir, les uns au lit, les autres au comptoir ...' ['Go ahead, my girl. Go and serve [the foreigners]. That's all we are good for. Serving them. Some in bed, some behind the counter ...'] (*FHUS*, 170) Demidov then explicitly links Russia's Westernisation to its neglect for war legacy; having smashed a glass case and gesticulating with blood-stained hands, he pulls out the trump card of his wartime sacrifice and heroism: 'Moi, avec ces mains-là [...], j'ai chargé une montagne d'obus. [...] [J]'ai versé pour vous des tonnes de sang, salauds! Moi, je vous ai sauvés de la peste brune [...]' ['I loaded a whole mountain of shells into the guns with them. With these hands. [...] I spilled gallons of blood for you, you bastards! I saved you from the brown plague [...]'!] (*FHUS*, 171) Yet, by reiterating the very phrase pronounced by the voice-over in the Stalingrad documentary, which, as we remember, Ivan himself found fallacious,¹³¹ the protagonist proves to have

129 Hubbs, p. XII.

130 Claude Hecham, 'Déformation des images traditionnelles de la Russie', in *Andreï Makine: Perspectives russes*, ed. by Parry, Scheidhauer and Welch, pp. 103–7, p. 104.

131 The same phrase would also have been found on Soviet war memorials scattered throughout the Eastern Bloc, which for the local populace symbolised the transfer from Nazi barbarism to Soviet tyranny. The theme of Soviet heroism and anti-fascist resistance is

internalised the propagandist discourse on the war or, to put it differently, to have fully identified with the role assigned to him by the state. Ultimately, passing from verbal insult to physical injury, Demidov grabs the statue of Misha, the mascot of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games that — crucially — provided the scene for Olya's moral downfall, and smashes it on the heads of Japanese shoppers whose country, once an Axis power, simultaneously incarnates fascism and the economically-developed West.

The coincidence between Russia's Westernisation and its disregard for its wartime past is yet more openly spelt out with the fate of Ivan's Gold Star that from a symbol of quasi-superhuman heroism is turned into an object of commercial exchange within a budding capitalist society. The first sign of this process is Olya's understanding of her father's heroic status as a means of buying train tickets without queuing, or as a way of entering a prestigious higher education institution. The devaluation of the Soviet Union's highest distinction is also prefigured by the scene showing Ivan rush to his wife's deathbed, his Gold Star having turned back to front, 'ressembl[ant] à un jouet' ['looking like a child's toy'] (*FHUS*, 84). Yet, if the episode of Tatyana's death only communicates Ivan's powerlessness in the face of higher forces, Olya's plans to use her father's wartime sacrifice to climb the social ladder articulates its commodification. Worse still, by being mixed up at the bottom of Olya's handbag with keys, lipstick or a pocket mirror, the Gold Star becomes a semi-worthless object of everyday use. That this is indeed the case is confirmed by Olya's thoughts in response to Ivan's reverential attitude towards his medal:

[La Grande Guerre patriotique] c'est toujours sa vie [...]. Il croit qu'il y a encore des gens pour se souvenir de cette guerre lointaine, de cet amour sur le front ... Ils sont tous comme des *enfants*. Toute une génération de *grands enfants trompés*.

[[The Great Fatherland War] is still his life. [...] He thinks there are still people around who remember that war long ago, all that comradeship at the front ... They're all just like *children*. A whole generation of *grown-up children who've been betrayed*.]

FHUS, 182, emphasis added

sounded, for example, in the massive memorial put up in 1949 in Treptower Park in Berlin and dedicated to Soviet soldiers who 'saved European civilisation from German fascism'. Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artefacts of German Memory, 1870–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 193. See also Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 101.

Prefigured by the episode of Tatyana's death as well as by the afore-discussed implicit references to *Ivan's Childhood* or the mirror stage, the trope of Ivan's infantilisation is then pursued through a dream that Olya has when sharing her parents' flat with her father's corpse. The image of Ivan shrinking to the size of a celluloid doll that Olya played with when little, conveys the protagonist's childlike naivety as well as his being a plaything in the hands of others, including his own daughter. Once again, the dream serves to underscore Demidov's victimhood and, consequently, is intended to make readers sympathise with him. The novel ends with the Gold Star's ultimate desecration when, to pay for her father's modest funeral, Olya must sell the medal and, its value being apparently insufficient, supplement it with her own body. And, although Olya plans to buy back the Gold Star, she will do it with money earned from prostitution, thus only completing the defilement of her father's heroics and ideals.

Conclusions

It appears that by staging a Hero of the Soviet Union as his debut novel's protagonist at the time when Russians began questioning heroic narratives, Makine wishes to salvage a bankrupt discourse and with it the reputation of the USSR as Europe's liberator from the 'brown plague'. Unlike many of the heroic legends that were discredited during *glasnost*, the story of a brave, patriotic and kind-hearted soldier narrated by *La Fille* resists all criticism, Ivan's immoral wartime behaviour, if any, being justified as a strategy for postwar survival. Additionally, Makine constructs Demidov's character in such a way that we cannot but feel sympathy for this naïve man, whose childlike gullibility is communicated both directly and indirectly with multifarious intertextual references. Similarly, although Makine shows it to be deliberately deceitful, his overall figuration of the myth of the Great Fatherland War makes us almost regret its dismantling. This is because the author praises the myth's capacity for endowing ordinary people's lives with meaning and value, for consolidating communities, and for providing the nation with a sense of pride and moral superiority over the West. As a result, *La Fille* posits the perpetuation of the cult of the war, with its heroines and heroes, as a desirable alternative to Russia's espousal of Western individualism, hedonism and mercantilism.

Yet, to be fair to the novel's treatment of the war, it must be stated that, in contrast to Makine's later works whose portrayal of the defining moment in Russia's twentieth-century history is progressively sanitised, *La Fille* does not shy away from tackling some of the darker sides of the Russo-German conflict, even if it explicitly questions the usefulness of such revisionism, and even if at the time of the novel's publication such revelations were secret neither in

the West nor in Russia itself. For instance, Makine mentions Stalin's ruthless attitude towards his own soldiers, manifest in the violence perpetrated by the NKVD or by the systematic persecution of POWs. Equally, however scantily, *La Fille* addresses the mismanagement and chaos reigning in the Red Army, the military commanders' lack of respect for human life, the pathetic level of medical services at the front, and, finally, the difficult questions of collaboration, looting and rape.

By doing so, as well as by shifting emphasis from the collective to the individual, *La Fille* potentially embraces historical revisionism characteristic to historiographic metafiction. Its alignment with postmodern thinking and aesthetics also proceeds from its intense intertextuality, exemplified by its parodying of canonical texts of Russian culture such as *War and Peace* or *Ivan's Childhood*. More specifically, Makine's first novel is in tune with postmodern war fiction that, for de Groot, is often concerned with the *a posteriori* rewriting and recasting of the soldier's experience so that it may become a myth.¹³² However, despite having managed to isolate successfully some typically postmodern themes and narrative devices, in this chapter I have also demonstrated that *La Fille's* underlying ambition is in fact to rehabilitate the myth of Russia's heroic and costly wartime effort. This means that the novel shares the didactic and moralistic dimension of classical historical literature and thus cannot be fully assimilated with postmodern fiction. Likewise, from the formal perspective, Makine's debut novel is still fairly traditional: while having a heterodiegetic third-person narrator, it makes ample use of free indirect discourse, which disturbingly complicates its stance on a range of important issues, such as the cult of Stalin. *La Fille* thus seems to be essentially paradoxical, which could indeed be a sign of its postmodern character, except that, inverting the pattern established by historiographic metafiction, Makine's novel ends up reinscribing the very ideologies and narrative conventions that it promises to debunk. Consequently, while flirting with postmodernism by, among others, projecting itself as discerning in relation to a dominant historiography, *La Fille* continues to have much in common with 'authoritarian fiction', as Susan Rubin Suleiman translates the French term 'roman à thèse'.¹³³ In the three chapters to come I will pursue this argument in relation to Makine's later work, showing that in the Franco-Russian author's prose postmodernism's central logic of pluralism, diversity, differentiation and open-endedness gives way to monologism and unequivocal interpretation of the past.

132 For the treatment of those, see de Groot, pp. 102–8.

133 Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 3.

The War Invalid: The *Samovar*, the *Kommunalka* and the Docile Body, or the Dialectic of Fragmentation and Plenitude

Introduction: 'The Heroic Flotsam and Jetsam of History'

If Ivan Demidov's faith in the myth of the war is put to the test by *glasnost* and its multiple revisions, recriminations and revelations, his belated awakening to the exploitation he has suffered at the hands of postwar regimes is catalysed by his chance meeting with Sasha Semyonov. This is because, unlike Demidov, whose intact body emblematises the heroic narrative of the Great Fatherland War, Sasha did not return from the front unscathed and, together with other countless maimed and disabled bodies with which Makine's oeuvre is replete, incarnates the reverse side of the Great Victory. To quote just some examples of '[des] débris héroïques de la victoire' ['the heroic flotsam and jetsam of the victory'] (FA, 86), in *La Fille* alone we encounter several wounded soldiers such as Ivan's fellow convalescent, a young lieutenant who has lost both his legs. There is also Ivan's wife, whose hand and breast have been mutilated, or the one-armed chief of the *kolkhoz* in Demidov's native village. A less direct impact of the war on the body is illustrated by Ivan's neighbour, Lidka, who, widowed at eighteen and, consequently, having to bear the brunt of heavy farm work, has visibly aged: she has lost her lovely singing voice, while her legs are marked by the long, dark strings of varicose veins. Makine's later novels offer further examples of war injuries: *Fleuve Amour* stages Verbin whose arm was blown off by a stray bullet as he was inscribing his name on the wall of the Reichstag, while *Jacques Dorme* casts a frontline nurse with a mutilated hand, an accordionist with both legs missing, and a telegraphist whose arms have been cut to ribbons by shrapnel but who assures the transmission of messages by clenching his teeth around a broken telephone cable. Although World War II is practically absent from *Olga Arbélina*, one of its minor characters, Li, is a victim of German torture; her hands are marked with cigarette burns and her dreams continue to be haunted by wartime nightmares. *La Musique*, whose central character's forehead is barred by a large scar, offers the disheartening spectacle of a young veteran missing a leg and laughing uproariously as he is reading a satirical magazine, and in *La Femme* we catch a glimpse of a former sub-machine gunner flicking through a copy of *Pravda* with the stumps

left by his missing fingers. In *Le Testament*, Makine poignantly addresses the tragic fate of *samovars*, as in postwar Soviet Union were called ex-soldiers who, missing most or all their limbs, evoked the Russian tea-making device. This tragedy is particularised in *Confession*, which follows a double amputee: Pyotr Evdokimov, an ex-sharp shooter. Yet, the greatest number of war-induced mutilations, ranging from a soldier learning to light a cigarette with the stumps of his hands to a body cut in two and still crawling, can be found in *Requiem*, which narrates the Soviet history in terms of armed conflicts and whose protagonist-narrator, a military surgeon, spends his life mending bodies destroyed by combat.

Since, as already mentioned, disability is a frequent metaphor of otherness and artists often portray the handicapped as a way of expressing their own sense of marginality,¹ one way of interpreting the proliferation of maimed bodies in Makine's novels is as reflective of the writer's own feeling of occupying a liminal place in relation to French culture. Such a reading is supported by the fact that the author's fictional alter-egos usually fancy themselves accursed poets who in their French (or American) exile suffer misrecognition, economic hardship or even homelessness, and who are chronically at odds with their hosts. Alternatively, the frequency with which Makine casts injured protagonists can be seen as an inescapable element of the historical reality in which the author's prose is anchored,² and, given that the institutionalised version of the war de-emphasised loss and suffering, as a counternarrative to official historiography. Indeed, when writing about war, be it World War II or other military conflicts, Makine does so chiefly in terms of its devastating impact, be it upon the human body, family, social fabric or infrastructure. The author's self-awareness of the revisionist nature of his approach to the topic war is evidenced by *Le Retour dans un rêve*, the debut film of Oleg Erdmann, Makine's novelistic alter ego in *Une femme aimée*. The fact that Soviet authorities condemn Oleg's film, whose protagonist-architect perceives the war in terms of the desolation it visits upon Europe's infrastructure, only confirms the suggestion that by staging countless war wounded Makine strives to undermine the heroic and cheerful state-sponsored version of the war. Yet, it needs to be pointed out that, in blotting out maimed bodies as much as they could, the official Soviet commemorations of the war were not very different from other official descriptions of military conflicts; on the contrary, although 'the activity of war is', according to Elaine Scarry, 'injuring and the central goal

1 Sandhal, p. 19.

2 Cf. Gillespie, 'Bartavels, Ortolans, and Borshch', p. 8.

of war is to out-injure the opponent',³ governments are keen to disown war-inflicted wounds and disabilities. This omission from military reports of the purpose of fighting, which is 'to burn, to blast, to shell, to cut', is explained by Scarry as either inherent in the structure of the war that requires that wounds should be partially eclipsed from view or as resulting from the self-evidence of wounding.⁴

While illustrating the applicability of Scarry's remarks to Makine's prose with the stories of Sasha Semyonov or Pyotr Evdokimov, in this chapter I will also consider the presence of maimed ex-soldiers in the author's work as an expression of the postmodern idea of fragmentation and difference, disabled bodies being, in Judith Butler's terms, the constitutive Other for able-bodied subjects.⁵ Butler's words are supported by the fact that Ivan Demidov's heroic identity hinges largely upon the spectacle of his comrades' wounded or massacred bodies, or that Semyonov's disability puts his situation into a new perspective. Additionally, the instances of damaged human bodies discussed in this chapter will corroborate Anna Carden-Coyne's contention that, like any disabled person, a maimed war veteran possesses a hybrid identity formed on society's edge, being simultaneously inside and outside a community that officially venerates and pities the soldier's sacrifice of his validity and health, but unofficially derides and stigmatises his disturbing difference.⁶ Also, for Carden-Coyne, any wound, and an amputation in particular, places the body between lack and wholeness, as the body recovers and is made complete once more through rehabilitation or use of prosthetic devices.⁷ As indicated by this chapter's subtitle, my intention is to demonstrate that, mirroring the wounded soldier's ambiguous social position, Makine's prose is structured by the dialectic of plenitude and fragmentation, which affects its both diegetic and narrative level. More broadly, I will argue that the maimed veteran's dual status could be seen as reflective of the underlying principle of Makine's manifestly disjointed writing, which, disobeying chronology and plagued by temporal ellipses, nevertheless strives to create a sense of unity and wholeness when it

3 Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 12.

4 Elaine Scarry, 'Injury and the Structure of War', *Representations*, 10 (Spring 1985), 1–51 (p. 1).

5 Ellen Jean Samuels, 'Critical Divides: Judith Butler's Body Theory and the Question of Disability', *NWSA Journal*, 14.3 (2002), 58–76.

6 Ana Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds: Military Patients and Medical Power in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 5.

7 *Idem.*

nostalgically reinscribes the disintegrated polity of the Soviet Union and its legitimating metanarrative.

Consequently, in my analysis of *Confession*, *Le Testament* and *Requiem* I will contend that in Makine's prose the war invalid translates, among others, the exiled narrators' sense of desolation resulting from the collapse of the Soviet *grand récit* and its key myth, which was that of the Great Fatherland War, and of the USSR itself that managed to gel together many ethnically, culturally, socially and linguistically different elements. In Makine's writing the relationship between war injuries and the dismemberment of the Soviet empire is corroborated, for example, by Semyonov's instrumental role in revealing Russia's sell-out to the West to Ivan, or by the metaphor of amputation repeatedly used by *Requiem*'s narrator to express the post-1991 desolation. Having compared Moscow's decision to abandon its former agents to an amputation of a gangrenous limb, the narrator describes his own grief in terms of a loss of a vital organ:

[J]e pensais à cette douleur fantôme qu'éprouve un blessé après l'amputation. Il sent, très charnellement, la vie du bras ou de la jambe qu'il vient de perdre. Je me disais qu'il en était ainsi pour le pays natal, pour la patrie, perdue ou réduite à l'état d'une ombre, et qu'il éveille en nous, à la fois déchirement et amour, dans les pulsations les plus intimes des veines rompues.

[I thought about the phantom pain that an injured man can feel after an amputation. He has an intense physical awareness of the life of the arm or leg he has just lost. I told myself it was the same for one's native land, for one's country, lost or reduced to the state of a shade and which comes to life again within us, as both desolation and love, in the deepest throbbing of the severed veins.]

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Finally, Makine systematically associates the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan, an event generally regarded as one that doomed the USSR, with death, destruction, demolition, wounds and amputations: in *La Fille* Svetka's world collapses when her fiancé is burnt alive in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan, while the Afghan veteran who takes over Ivan's duties at the school has a missing foot. Similarly, Alyosha of *Confession* returns from Afghanistan badly scarred, both physically and mentally, and remembers the Soviet incursion solely in terms of the injuries suffered by his comrades and by civilians alike. Additionally, his

homecoming coincides with the disintegration of the housing estate on which he grew up and, correlately, of the way of life that he knew in his youth.

Given that in Makine's prose war victims are bound in the network of history, power and politics, the theoretical underpinning of my discussion in this chapter will be provided mainly by the works of Foucault and Butler, who both, albeit with some differences, see the body as a passive substratum inscribed and effectively ruined by power regimes and history. Here I will treat this idea literally, exemplifying it with the Soviet state's destructive moulding and taming of the soldier's body as it was fighting Hitler's Germany with little consideration for its troops' life or health. However, although the depictions of Semyonov's or Evdokimov's unfair treatment by wartime and postwar regimes is certainly meant as an indictment of Soviet authorities, Makine effectively inverts, as I will demonstrate, the amputee's original significance, transforming a figure of loss and fragmentation into one of unity and totality. In so doing, the author subverts the movement traced by historiographic metafiction, for he foregrounds the wounded soldiers' exclusion from the Soviet war narrative only to turn them into icons of this narrative, all this to the effect of arousing his reader's awe and sympathy for the mighty Soviet state and its ever-suffering people. Later I will also show that a similar process is at work in Makine's representation of the communal apartment which, created through the partition of private homes into multiple dwellings, is a figure of fragmentation par excellence but which, paradoxically, the author endows with unifying and therapeutic qualities. In other words, although remembered by those with direct knowledge of such shared flats as a logistical nightmare and a sinister tool of social control, in Makine's work the *kommunalka* is capable of treating society's ills and individual traumas, and in particular is instrumental in the disabled veteran's rehabilitation and social reintegration. Finally, the same journey from fragmentation to wholeness is followed, as I will also argue in this chapter, by the *samovar*, whose primary connotations to family life and communality are undermined through its association with mutilated veterans. Yet, just as he does with the *kommunalka*, the author eventually turns the amputees, who are represented as condemned to solitude, destitution, social marginality, banishment and, effectively, death, into an emblem of Russia's wartime sacrifice and the unity of purpose that Soviet propaganda attached to the Great Fatherland War. Hence, like the mutilated Greek and Roman sculptures that stir up the idea of the two empires' former cultural splendour and, by extension, political influence and military prowess, in Makine's writing the soldiers' horrifically maimed bodies and, as I will demonstrate in the chapter's final section, Pyrrhic victories become a poignant memento of Soviet Russia's erstwhile greatness.

Written on the Body

Michel Foucault's theory of the congenitally unilateral relations between the state and its citizens has the potential to underscore both the helplessness of Makinean protagonists at the hands of the simultaneously punitive and quasi-anonymous regime, and the key role of discourse and ideology in this regime's exercise of power. Although the twentieth century produced unprecedentedly bloody wars and previously unimaginable holocausts, the state's power, according to Foucault, presents itself as solicitous towards its subjects, an idea that originates in the nineteenth century where the social *body* was first seen as in need of quasi-medical care:⁸

ce formidable pouvoir de mort se donne maintenant [...] comme le complémentaire d'un pouvoir qui s'exerce positivement sur la vie, [...] entreprend de la guérir, de la majorer, de la multiplier, d'exercer sur elle des contrôles précis et des régulations d'ensemble.

[this formidable power of death [...] presents itself as the counterpart of a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimise, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations.]⁹

Despite these appearances, the wielding of power is, in Foucault's view, an inherently material, violent and *corporeal* process that is articulated by discourse/ideology:¹⁰

[L]e corps est aussi directement plongé dans un champ politique; les rapports de pouvoir opèrent sur lui une prise immédiate; ils l'investissent, le marquent, le dressent, le supplicient, l'astreignent à des travaux, l'obligent à des cérémonies, exigent de lui des signes.

8 Michel Foucault, 'Pouvoir et corps', in *Dits et écrits* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 754–62 (p. 754).

9 Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 180. This and all the following translations of quotations from *Histoire de la sexualité: La volonté de savoir* come from *History of Sexuality, Volume 1: The Will to Know*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978).

10 Foucault, 'Pouvoir et corps', p. 756.

[[T]he body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it; train it; torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs.]¹¹

The body is thus controlled and subjugated by power regimes through various disciplinary procedures, such as corporeal punishment, prisons or wars, all this to render it useful and productive.¹² In this process history inscribes itself upon the body, stigmatising or even destroying it, while the genealogist's task — genealogy being a science investigating things that allegedly have no history such as reason, truth, the soul or the subject, and concentrating on the singularity of events outside of any causality or finality —¹³ is to make this influence evident:¹⁴ 'La généalogie, comme analyse de la provenance, est donc l'articulation du corps et de l'histoire. Elle doit montrer le corps tout imprimé d'histoire, et l'histoire ruinant le corps.' ['Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body.']¹⁵

If Butler mostly agrees with Foucault on the body's entrapment in the power/discourse nexus,¹⁶ her strictly constructivist position excludes the possibility of the body's existence prior to its cultural construction by power regimes and by their key instrument, which is discourse.¹⁷ For the American gender theorist the body is a *tabula rasa* or, to use Foucault's words, 'surface d'inscription des événements' ['the inscribed surface of events'],¹⁸ which means that it has no pre-discursive ontology or material independence from the power regimes that constitute it.¹⁹ Conversely, as a neo-Nietzschean genealogist, Foucault allows for the idea that the body is historically constituted and bears a stamp of

11 Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, p. 30.

12 *Ibidem*, pp. 30–1.

13 Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Généalogie, Histoire', p. 393.

14 *Ibidem*, p. 403.

15 *Idem*.

16 Judith Butler, 'Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 68.11 (1989), 601–7 (p. 602).

17 *Idem*.

18 Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Généalogie, Histoire', p. 402.

19 Butler, 'Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions', p. 602. For a more detailed discussion of the differences between Foucault's and Butler's position on the Nietzschean term of genealogy, see Moya Lloyd, *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

its descent (*Herkunft*) that marks the body's nervous system, temperament and digestive apparatus:

Mauvaise respiration, mauvaise alimentation, corps débile et affaîssé de ceux dont les ancêtres ont commis des erreurs [...]. [C]'est le corps qui porte, dans sa vie et sa mort, dans sa force et sa faiblesse, la sanction de toute vérité et de toute erreur, comme il en porte aussi, et inversement, l'origine —, la provenance.

[[Descent] appears in faulty respiration, in improper diets, in the debilitated and prostrate bodies of those whose ancestors committed errors. [...] [T]he body maintains, in life as in death, through its strength or weakness the sanction of every truth and error, as it sustains, in an inverse manner, the origin — descent.]²⁰

The omnipresence of the war wounded in Makine's novels means that Foucault's and Butler's contentions can provide my discussion of the author's treatment of disability resulting from fighting with an appropriate theoretical context. Thus illuminated, invalids such as the *samovars* literally illustrate history's power to imprint itself upon the body and the power of the Russian language, as usurped by propaganda, to become a violent tool in the hands of the patriarchal regime. To put it differently, the maimed veterans support the view that history is a signifying practice requiring the subjugation of the body and the inscription of its surface. And if, officially, the disabled ex-soldiers narrate the tale of the exorbitant price Russia paid for its victory over Hitler, unofficially, they speak of the authorities' — both civil and military — disregard for human life and welfare. Yet, as evidenced by Demidov's case, it is not only those who have lost their health at the front whose bodies articulate the story of the Great Fatherland War, but also those who managed to preserve their corporeal integrity. By being decorated with the Gold Star of the Hero of the Soviet Union, Demidov literally becomes stamped with the regime's propagandist discourse. The protagonist's gullible complicity with the official narrative on the war, which translates itself into Ivan's willingness to serve as an eloquent though silent artefact, transpires from his obstinate refusal to part with his medal, be it in German captivity or later when Demidov's drink habit pushes him to sell his decorations. In the earlier situation Ivan hides the Gold Star during the searches by pressing it so hard into the palm of his hand that it leaves a durable imprint. It is noteworthy that the mark's position coincides

20 Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Généalogie, Histoire', pp. 401–2.

with that of some of the stigmata on Christ's crucified body, which, given Ivan's role as a synecdoche for his homeland, once again underscores the recurrent idea of the Soviet Union's Christ-like sacrifice for the sake of liberating Europe from fascism.

Those who, unlike Ivan, resolutely refuse to endorse the officially codified and impersonal account of the war by removing themselves from the regime's grasp, have, as does Pavel of *Requiem* or Volsky of *L'Homme inconnu*, their bodies brutally destroyed with unproportionate violence. Moreover, Pavel's son will be forever branded as a child of the 'enemy of the people' and, consequently, will be relegated to the margins of normative Soviet society. This scenario repeats itself through the story of Pavel's Jewish comrade, Marelst, who is stigmatised by his father's fall from grace and whose tragedy exemplifies Foucault's (rather than Butler's) position that a body is a surface influenced by a set of forces external and anterior to the body. That a body is inevitably entangled in the web of history, power, ideology and discourse even before its birth, transpires from the fact that Marelst's fortunes, including his tragic end, are determined by his father's politics. A son of a zealous Bolshevik who joined the revolution in response to state-sponsored violence against his fellow Jews, Marelst is inscribed with his father's views as well as, more broadly, with his country's historical development when he is given the oddly sounding name composed of the initials of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.²¹ In a process analogous to the act of christening, where the name given at birth settles the question of the infant's gender (or even of sex), this 'performative', as Butler calls a discursive practice that *produces* what it means,²² literally engraves upon Marelst's body the values of post-revolutionary Soviet society where the communal and the public were to triumph over the private and the individualistic characterising pre-revolutionary, bourgeois lifestyles.²³ The choice of Marelst's

21 Richard Stites discusses this fashion of 'Octobering', that is of giving children names constructed of Bolshevik slogans and, as in Marelst's case, of names of revolutionary leaders. He also records examples of adults changing their names to, for example, Revolution. Other examples of babies' names given between the Revolution and the outbreak of the Great Fatherland War are Ledat (Lev Davidovitch Trotsky), Trolen (Trotsky, Lenin), Karm (Red Army), Rjem (Revolution, Engels, Marx), Pravda (Truth), Molot (Hammer), or Elektrifikatsya (Electrification). Richard Stites, 'Understanding NEP Society', *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Russian Society and Culture*, ed. by Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch and Richard Stites (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 310–20 (pp. 301–2).

22 Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 107.

23 Boym, *Common Places*, pp. 29–120.

name, which Butler would call an act of '*discursive production*,'²⁴ highlights the excessive power of the symbolic in the process of the body's construction, subjugation and annihilation by history, and illustrates Foucault's claim regarding propaganda's destructive force: 'le démagogue est conduit à la dégénération du corps pour bien établir la souveraineté de l'idée intemporelle; l'historien est amené à l'effacement de sa propre individualité pour que les autres entrent en scène et puissent prendre la parole.' ['the demagogue denies the body to secure the sovereignty of a timeless idea, and the historian effaces his proper individuality so that others may enter the stage and reclaim their own speech.']²⁵

That the symbolic is indeed invested with power is confirmed when Marelst is sent to a punishment battalion for having failed to shout Stalin's name on command, whereby he refuses to produce articulable cultural significations expected of him by the oppressive state. This act of rebellion testifies to Marelst's repeated — albeit vain — efforts to disentangle himself from his enmeshment in history, power and ideology-invested language, evidenced by his decision to renounce his privileged background, to join the Red Army as a volunteer, or to use the pages from a notebook containing his youthful poems as rolling paper. In the end, however, the protagonist is coerced into — to borrow Foucault's term — *docility*, his body's subjection being measured by its usefulness to the war effort. Marelst's conduct during his unit's quasi-suicidal assault on the concentration camp becomes a proof of his total obedience and therefore utmost *utility*. Firstly, he overcomes the revulsion provoked by the viscous, yellowish waters of the corpse- and human ashes-filled moat in which he has to wade chest-deep. Then, after a fragment of a hand grenade takes off his bottom jaw — an injury that symbolically punishes Marelst's earlier verbal impunity — his dead body is turned into a bridge for his comrades crossing the moat. Yet, this is not where the abusive utilisation of Marelst's body ends. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator conjures up the ghost of his father's Jewish comrade, so that he may repel any Western attempts to undermine the narrative of Soviet heroics. By turning the Jewish soldier into a mute yet expressive symbol of Russia's martyrdom for the sake of Europe's freedom from Nazism, the narrator only repeats the Soviet authorities' exploitative treatment of Marelst. To summarise, the Jew's body becomes triply useful to the Russian cause. Firstly, having been trained into submission and exposed to horrific wounding, it becomes an instrument of warfare. Secondly, inscribed with cultural meanings, such as the USSR's self-sacrificing mission, Marelst's body is turned into a weapon in the narrator's ideological battle

24 Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p. 107.

25 Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Généalogie, Histoire', p. 414.

against the purportedly programmatically anti-Russian West. Finally, as we will see in Chapter 4, Marelst's story assists Makine's inherently anti-Semitic project of depriving the Jews of their cultural, religious or linguistic specificity. It also helps him to champion the idea of a pan-Soviet identity that minimised the differences between the nations living within the USSR's borders, yet kept the Russians in an indisputably privileged position. Consequently, as he does with other wounded soldiers featured in his novels, Makine (ab)uses Marelst's tortured, dismembered and annihilated body to restore the narrative of self-immolation and glory, a narrative that legitimated the Soviet system, justified its multiple and diverse crimes, and consolidated the nation's identity despite Soviet people's internal divisions and their grievances against the state.

The 'Ugly Vestiges of the War': Sasha Semyonov and Pyotr Evdokimov

Like Berggolts, who believed that 'missing arms do not deform Venus',²⁶ Kirschenbaum states that in the postwar Soviet Union amputees 'could still embody godlike powers — heroism, bravery, and dedication'.²⁷ Implicitly contradicting such a view, Makine's novels foreground the state's marginalisation and, in some cases, victimisation of the war wounded, thus illustrating Edele's observation that invalids were 'clearly amongst the losers in postwar Soviet society'.²⁸ Having said that, the German historian remarks that invalids were still better off than other groups, enjoying a range of benefits,²⁹ and notes that this situation continued beyond 1948 when privileges for former service

26 Olga Berggolts, 'Dnevnye zvezdy', *Ogonek*, 19, 5–12 May 1990, p. 16. Quoted by Lisa Kirschenbaum, "'The Alienated Body": Gender Identity and the Memory of the Siege of Leningrad', in *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*, ed. by Nancy Meriwether Wingfield and Maria Bucur (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 220–34 (p. 230).

27 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 257.

28 Edele, 'Soviet Veterans as an Entitlement Group, 1945–1955', p. 116.

29 Disabled veterans had special pension rights and tax privileges, were subject to specific labour regulations, and were exempt from tuition fees in some institutions of higher education. They were also supposed to get preferred access to fuel, housing, food and other goods, and were granted special conditions in the repayment of housing-construction loans. Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society 1941–1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 84; and 'Soviet Veterans as an Entitlement Group, 1945–1955', p. 123.

personnel were discontinued due to Stalin's policy of curtailing war remembrance. Less optimistic about the fate of wounded soldiers is Tumarkin. Unlike Edele, who, rather than to a deliberate policy, ascribes the maimed veterans' situation to 'the underdevelopment of the Soviet welfare state, the devastation of the country and the pressures to rebuild Stalinism within the context of the global confrontation with the United States',³⁰ Tumarkin posits the marginalisation of the disabled as part of Stalin's efforts to turn war memory into 'a stirring but safely distant reminder of the success of the socialist system and its Supreme Leader'.³¹ Tumarkin places particular emphasis on the deplorable deficiency of postwar medical facilities in providing care for the sick and wounded, and invokes the 'pitiful home-hewn prosthetic devices on wheels that cripples made for themselves because government-issued prostheses were either unavailable or of unusable quality'.³² She also speaks of the 'soulless attitude towards invalids that reigned in government institutions after the war',³³ which she attributes, among other things, to Stalin's perception of the cripples as 'ugly vestiges of the war' that did not fit in with the state-concocted version of the conflict.³⁴

Tumarkin's comments find illustration in the already-mentioned case of Semyonov who, having suffered a relatively benign injury to the toe, ends up having his whole leg amputated. This was due to the makeshift conditions in which he was treated at the front. When relaying his tale to Ivan, Sasha stresses his consequent sexual impotence and the life-long solitude to which his loss of manhood has condemned him. Hence, in contrast to Demidov, who until Tatyana's death enjoyed a happy family life and the special privilege of living in his own one-bedroom apartment,³⁵ Ivan's comrade vegetates in a squalid room in a *kommunalka* on a pension so meagre that, to make ends meet, he must engage in 'speculation', as Soviet authorities called any activity

30 *Idem.*

31 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 101.

32 *Ibidem*, p. 99.

33 *Idem.*

34 *Ibidem*, p. 100.

35 Ivan is likely to have obtained his flat as part of Khrushchev's 'One family — one flat' policy. See Boym, *Common Places*, p. 125; Lynne Attwood, 'Housing in the Khrushchev Era', in *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. by Lynne Attwood and Susan E. Reid (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 177–202 (p. 177); and Christine Varga-Harris, 'Homemaking and the Aesthetic and Moral Perimeters of the Soviet Home during the Khrushchev Era', *Journal of Social History*, 41.3 (Spring 2001), 561–89.

involving buying and reselling goods at a profit.³⁶ Even without knowing about Gorbachev's 'dry laws', which were a part of his campaign against alcoholism,³⁷ we can guess the underground character of Sasha's dealings; it is *under* his bed that he keeps the vodka he resells at inflated prices after the shops' closing time, and it is on the platforms of *underground* metro stations that he scalps theatre tickets bought thanks to his veteran status. By engaging in these shady activities, Semyonov exposes himself to violence, as illustrated by the scene where two youngsters insult him and threaten to break his crutches. To Sasha's misery adds an ill-fitted false leg: 'tu la portes un jour, et toute la semaine le ventre saigne.' ['if you wear it for a day your stomach bleeds all week.'] (*FHUS*, 153) Significantly, Semyonov's words are later echoed by the afore-mentioned Afghanistan veteran who also suffers from a painful and cumbersome prosthetic foot: 'Les prothèses qu'on nous fabrique, elles sont franchement dégueulasses. Quand tu marches dans la rue, tu grinces des dents. Et quand tu les délaces, il y a du sang plein les bottes. [La prothèse] est dure comme ...' ['The artificial limbs they make for us are simply diabolical. When you walk down the street you have to grit your teeth. And when you take them off your boots are full of blood. [The prosthesis] is as hard as ...'] (*FHUS*, 123) If, by closing the gap between the two veterans and thus between the wars they fought in, Makine once again reposit Russia's history as, to borrow Tumarkin's expression, 'an inventory of glorified victories and lamented military loses',³⁸ he disconcertingly equates a defensive war that concluded in the USSR's indisputable victory with

36 See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 59.

37 Boym, *Common Places*, p. 149.

38 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 52. Cf. *Fleuve Amour*, *Olga Arbélina* or *Requiem* where Russia's past is narrated as a string of wars and revolutions. In the earliest of the three novels, this is how Makine summarises Russia's history: 'Dès le début du siècle, l'histoire, tel un redoutable balancier, s'est mis à balayer l'Empire par son va-et-vient titanesque. Les hommes portaient, les femmes s'habillaient de noir. Le balancier mesurait le temps: la guerre contre le Japon; la guerre contre l'Allemagne; la Révolution: la guerre civile ... Et de nouveau, mais dans l'ordre inversé: la guerre contre les Allemands; la guerre contre les Japonais. Et les hommes portaient, tantôt traversant les douze mille kilomètres pour remplir les tranchées à l'ouest, tantôt pour se perdre dans le néant brumeux de l'océan de l'est.' ['From the start of the century, history, like a titanic pendulum, had begun to sweep fearsomely to and fro across the empire. The men went away; the women dressed in black. The pendulum kept the measure of the passing time: the war against Japan; the war against Germany; the Revolution; the civil war ... And then once again, but in reverse order: the war against the Germans; the war against the Japanese. And the men went away, now crossing the twelve thousand leagues of the empire to fill the trenches in the west, now disappearing into the misty void of the ocean to the east.'] (*TFA*, 22) This

a colonial invasion that ended in a catastrophic defeat.³⁹ Whatever Makine's political agenda, the situation of Sasha and the nameless Afghanistan veteran illustrates Scarry's view that 'war [...] requires both the reciprocal infliction of massive injury and the eventual disowning of the injury so that its attributes can be transferred elsewhere, as they cannot if they are permitted to cling to the original site of the wound, the human body.'⁴⁰ More specifically, it corroborates Carden-Coyne's position that with prosthetic devices the state wants to inhibit or at least suspend 'mourning for lost body parts and former identities', striving to erase pain and disability from the wounded body.⁴¹ Although Carden-Coyne's comments relate to the Great War, they can be easily extended to the Soviet context where the authorities wished to displace attention from loss, as it did not fit in with the triumphalist narrative of the Great Victory.

I shall now return to the detail of Semyonov's emasculation, since it reinforces the theme of the soldier's infantilisation I explored in the previous chapter in relation to Demidov's victimhood. To begin with, Sasha's condition can be inscribed into the well-established connection between wounds and loss of manhood, grounded in the Freudian link between amputation and castration.⁴² According to Gabriel Koureas, war injuries and the resulting pain challenge the 'unconquerable manhood', as the critic calls the military model of masculinity.⁴³ They also call into question the civilian social norms of manliness that, in Carden-Coyne's terms, imply professional or industrial engagement, as well as being a breadwinner, a husband and a father, or, briefly speaking, a physically competent male head of a household.⁴⁴ Moreover, wounds, and especially amputations, break apart bodily identity and 'fracture

translation comes from *Once Upon the River Love*, trans. by Geoffrey Strachan (London: Penguin, 1999).

39 A similar strategy has been observed by Gregory Carleton in recent Russian cinema where, as exemplified by Fyodor Bondarchuk's *9th Company* (2005) 'a bloody mess [is elevated] into an ennobling experience' precisely through establishing parallels between the Soviet Vietnam and the Great Fatherland War. Carleton, 'Victory in Death', p. 152.

40 Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 64.

41 Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 352.

42 William E. Block and Pierre E. Ventur, 'A Study of the Psychoanalytic Concept of Castration Anxiety in Symbolically Castrated Amputees', *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 37.3 (1967), 518–26.

43 Gabriel Koureas, *Memory, Masculinity and National Identity in British Visual Culture, 1914–1930: A Study of 'Unconquerable Manhood'* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2007).

44 Ana Carden-Coyne, 'Gendering the Politics of War Wounds Since 1914', in *Gender and Conflict since 1914: Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Ana Carden-Coyne (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 83–97 (p. 85).

the basis upon which gender and sexuality are constructed'.⁴⁵ Although war injuries can sometimes be eroticised or romanticised,⁴⁶ they usually 'revers[e] manhood into the fragility and dependence associated with femininity and childhood',⁴⁷ while military medicine turns the injured soldier into a passive, fragile and effeminate, not to say infant-like object of the doctors' and especially nurses' quasi-maternal care.⁴⁸ This view is shared by Scarry who notes that sickness, injury or operation all entail heightened forms of the passive: '[t]he patient is in a situation of extreme passivity; the physician or surgeon, extreme activeness'.⁴⁹ The afore-cited remarks are backed by Makine's own representation of wounded soldiers, as instantiated by Semyonov or Demidov. As we will see in Chapter 4, the trope of childhood also structures the stories of Alexei Berg in *La Musique* and of Charlotte's husband, Fyodor, whose case I will examine later in this chapter. Finally, Chapter 4 will reveal that Makine's inter-textual references to Saint Christopher's legend establish a parallel between Evdokimov and Child Jesus carried across a treacherous river. In this way, the author not only reiterates the analogy between the Soviet Union's contribution to World War II and Christ's martyrdom, but also accentuates the wounded protagonist's childlike vulnerability.

Contrary to Semyonov, Berg or Fyodor, Evdokimov progresses from a sorrowful figure of fragmentation towards one of plenitude, which he does, as I will now contend, thanks to inherently Russian communality, generosity, solidarity and kind-heartedness, all institutionalised in the communal apartment and its extension, the communal courtyard. Injured by Soviet rather than German fire, *Confession's* amputee protagonist is denied any of the privileges normally reserved for disabled veterans, such as an invalid car. Pyotr therefore moves around in a makeshift wheelchair — 'une caisse montée sur quatre grandes roues à billes' ['a chest mounted on four big wheels with ball bearings'] —, which may drive well on paving stones but not on uneven terrain:

45 Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 5. See also Ana Carden-Coyne, 'Masculinity and the Wounds of the First World War: A Centenary Reflection', *Revue française de civilisation britannique*, 20.1 (2015) <<https://rfcb.revues.org/305>>; Ana Carden-Coyne, 'Painful Bodies and Brutal Women: Remedial Massage, Gender Relations and Cultural Agency in Military Hospitals, 1914–18', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 1.2 (2008), pp. 139–58; and Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Britain, Male Bodies and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996).

46 Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 11 and p. 232.

47 *Ibidem*, p. 5.

48 *Ibidem*, p. 274.

49 Elaine Scarry, 'Consent and the Body: Injury, Departure, and Desire', *New Literary History*, 21.4 (Autumn 1990), 867–96 (p. 873).

‘sur la terre, surtout au printemps et en automne, il peinait comme un bagnard, se tortillait dans sa caisse et jurait en enfonçant dans le sol ses deux bâtons.’ [‘on the earth, especially in spring and autumn, he suffered as if on a treadmill, twisting and turning in his crate, swearing and thrusting his two sticks into the ground.’] (CPDD, 43)⁵⁰ As for going up and down the stairs, Pyotr relies on a kindly neighbour to carry him on his back. Yet, before Evdokimov’s fortune is transformed by his marriage to Lyouba and his friendship with Yakov Zinger, his life is marked by solitude, destitution, alcohol abuse and sexual deprivation, and, consequently, very much resembles Semyonov’s situation. With his pitiable pension Evdokimov covers the cost of half a room and board provided by his landlady, Zakharovna, any other expenses, such as cigarettes or vodka, having to be paid for with money earned from begging. Pyotr’s disadvantaged position in relation to those able-bodied manifests itself not only in his severely curtailed mobility, exemplified by his inability to reach the hatch of the kiosk where he procures alcohol, but also in his relations with the opposite sex. Too embarrassed about his disability, Pyotr stops short of chatting up a pretty shop assistant and rides away from the kiosk in a hurry. To overcome at least momentarily his marginality he indulges in vodka-induced fantasies about returning to the social norm of able-bodiedness and, consequently, manhood. The trope of wax used in the description of Pyotr’s daydreams suggests the protagonist’s desire to have his fragmented body reshaped and remoulded in such a way as to make it whole again.

This imaginary process repeats the Soviet state’s earlier gesture that turned Evdokimov from ‘un homme de la terre’ [‘a man of the soil’] (CPDD, 57) into the already-invoked ‘docile body’, epitomised for Foucault by a modern-day soldier:

[L]e soldat est devenu quelque chose qui se fabrique; d’une pâte informe, d’un corps inapte, on a fait la machine dont on a besoin; on a redressé peu à peu les postures; lentement une contrainte calculée parcourt chaque partie du corps, s’en rend maître, plie l’ensemble, le rend perpétuellement disponible, et se prolonge, en silence, dans l’automatisme des habitudes; bref, on a ‘chassé le paysan’ et on lui a donné ‘air du soldat’.

[[T]he soldier became something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture

50 This and all the following translations of quotations from *Confession d’un porte-drapeau déchu* come from *Confessions of a Fallen Standard-Bearer*, trans. by Geoffrey Strachan (New York: Arcade, 2000).

is gradually corrected, a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of the habit; in short, one has 'got rid of the peasant' and 'given him the air of a soldier'.]⁵¹

Yet, if by emphasising Evdokimov's peasant origins and vocation to work the land Makine implicitly supports Foucault's analysis, his main objective seems to be to communicate his protagonist's lack of inclination to become a soldier. Pyotr's distaste for violence is signalled, firstly, by his childhood trauma caused by the sight of a hunter breaking the neck of a wounded hare, and, later, by his compassionate attitude towards the Germans he shoots. As already suggested in Chapter 1, Evdokimov is one of Makine's characters who serve to underscore the Russians' espousal of the Christian ideals of forgiveness, compassion and reconciliation, as well as their inherent pacifism. To justify Pyotr's choice of a military career, Makine compares the interwar Soviet Union to 'une "forteresse assiégée du socialisme"' ['a "besieged fortress of socialism"'] where everyone had to learn to shoot and many young people, including Evdokimov himself, joined the training circle of the Voroshilov marksmen (*CPDD*, 57). Read in the light of the fact that during their stay at a pioneer camp Pyotr's and Yakov's sons discover Voroshilov's portrait in a storeroom holding anything that might pollute the camp's pristine look, this fleeting reference to Stalin's collaborator acts as an omen of Pyotr's postwar marginality. If one assumes a metonymic substitution of meaning between Evdokimov and the portrait of Voroshilov, who, made twice Hero of the Soviet Union, was forced to retire under Khrushchev,⁵² we can confirm the protagonist's place on the edge of normative society where he dwells with the war's other uncomfortable victims. Indeed, the camp clearly actualises the official image of the USSR's past, present and future, an image opposed to the private and traumatic prewar and wartime memories of Alyosha's and Arkady's parents, as well as to the difficult living conditions in postwar Soviet Russia, including food shortages, cramped accommodation and lack of political freedom.

The Amputee and the Fragmented Narrative

The idea of fragmentation embodied by the limbless protagonist is also reflected in *Confession's* other aspects, including the sense of alienation experienced

51 Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, p. 137.

52 Marshall Kliment Voroshilov (1881–1969) was responsible for many of the executions carried out during the 1930s purges.

by the novel's autodiegetic narrator who, typically for Makine's fiction, is a Paris-based Russian writer harking back to his Soviet childhood. Alyosha Evdokimov's memories focus on the troubling discrepancy between, on the one hand, the myth of national unity and triumph, fed to his generation at school in term-time and at the pioneer camp during holidays, and, on the other, his parents' harrowing prewar and wartime memories, and their humdrum postwar existence. This discrepancy was responsible for both a schism in Alyosha's psyche and his consequent estrangement from Soviet mainstream culture, which only predisposed him to his future exilic condition. The protagonist-narrator's 'ex-centricity', to borrow Hutcheon's term again, is figured with the image of him standing in the middle of the Carrefour de l'Odéon, a busy junction that, located in a popular and upmarket part of Paris, is home to publishing houses, bookstores and cultural establishments, not to mention the Sorbonne. Despite his professional success, Alyosha feels uneasy and forlorn in a place which clearly epitomises the idea of the *centre*, and which he perceives as oppressively hot, noisy (a sledgehammer is working in the background) and overcrowded. Watching a man smoothly slide into an elegant car, Alyosha realises the inexorable distance between himself and 'des gens normaux' ['normal people'] (*CPDD*, 17). This is because of his Soviet childhood and his rebellion against and resulting expulsion from official Soviet society. Likewise, he has been forever estranged from his hosts by his participation in the Afghan war and the consequent mental and physical scars that have left him beyond the hope of rehabilitation and re-socialisation. Finally, what sets him and his French hosts apart is the encroaching disintegration of the country which, however violent and absurd, was Alyosha's homeland.

Additionally amplified by the image of the scattered Russian diaspora and the infrequent and haphazard exchanges among its members, Alyosha's inner fragmentation translates into the disjointed structure of the book he is writing and we are reading. Rather than by a more or less linear plot, as it was in *La Fille*, *Confession's* narrative is driven by a self-conscious autodiegetic narrator who pieces together his own scattered recollections of the 1960s Soviet Union as well as scraps of transgenerational memories belonging to his own and Arkady's parents. The novel thus possesses four temporal levels: one situated in the 1990s France; one located in Khrushchev's Russia; one coinciding with the youth of Alyosha's and Arkady's parents; and yet another one placed in the 1980s, during the Afghan war. The rhetoric of rupture is realised, *inter alia*, by the constant shuttling among these temporal frames or by the narratorial interjections Alyosha makes from the vantage point of his Parisian exile. The sense of disunity is further heightened by the disruption of the narrative's flow by three 'short stories' relating the past of Alyosha's and Arkady's parents. In contrast to the enveloping text, these vignettes have a third-person,

heterodiegetic and omniscient narrator, and are told in a chronological manner, their autonomy being additionally marked by their titles and distinctive typographical setting. Finally, the novel's diegesis is often interrupted by ekphratic descriptions of the films screened by the travelling cinema in the estate's courtyard, by the poems Alyosha and Arkady learn as part of their patriotic-military upbringing, and by contemporaneous songs spilling from open windows of the housing estate where the Evdokimovs and the Zingers live. While helping readers to situate the novel's action in a specific historical context, these intertextual references contribute to the impression that life — and especially communal life — under Khrushchev was quasi-idyllic. But as well as the protagonist-narrator's sense of loss, resulting from his exilic condition and undoubtedly intensified by the impinging collapse of the Soviet Union, the novel's disjointed construction also mirrors the situation of Alyosha's and Arkady's parents who, on a daily basis, had to reconcile their painful memories with the official and overtly optimistic image of the 1930s and 1940s. For example, Lyoubia Evdokimova can hardly mention her childhood spent in orphanages for the offspring of the 'enemies of the people', where she found herself after her mother and father had been purged. As for Faya Moysseyevna, she has two reasons for keeping her childhood under wraps; as I will fully explain in Chapter 4, the Holocaust, which, we assume, claimed the life of Faya's parents, was taboo subject after the war. Additionally, as it will become clear in Chapter 5, Moysseyevna's recollection of the blockade of Leningrad, during which she lost her grandmother to famine and then witnessed cannibalism, is incongruous with the official narrative about the hero-city and its valiant defendants. Worse still, Yakov Zinger is not only a Holocaust survivor but also, as a former *Sonderkommando*, someone potentially seen as collaborator. Finally, caused by friendly fire, Pyotr's injury does not fit in with the state-sponsored version of the war either, which means that, like the other three adults, he must withhold his memories even from his own son. Otherwise, Alyosha could be — and indeed will be — ostracised for attempting to contradict the simultaneously radiant and bathetic view of Soviet history.

Ultimately, *Confession's* fragmented structure can be linked to the imminent end of the USSR, foretold by two concurrent events: the demolition of the red-brick housing estate and the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan. In the novel's only episode located in the 1980s, Alyosha returns to his native town of Sestrovsk on leave, to find the demolition of the estate in progress. The communal flats are giving way to individual apartments in enormous tower blocks and to a new form of living; the convivial atmosphere once reigning in the communal spaces has been replaced by private concerns, as can be inferred from the sight of individual young mothers pushing prams or men repairing or washing their

cars. If this modification of lifestyle reflects the socio-political changes undergone by Russia during *perestroika*, the force of these changes and the distress they cause to the older generation are communicated by the upheaval created by the construction of the new tower blocks. Yet, the most upsetting downside of Gorbachev's reforms is, we are made to believe, people's growing indifference towards their country's wartime history, evidenced by Faya's complaint about the general lack of interest in the siege of Leningrad.

The Poetics of Fragment: Archaeology and Fresco Painting

It is at this point in the story that Alyosha reveals his identity as the author of *Confession* and begins expounding metatextually upon his book's construction and the writer's craft in general. The jerky narrative and the subjective and personal character of the text we are reading is a result, Alyosha explains, of his earlier disappointing experience as novelist. More specifically, in his book set during the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Alyosha followed the realist convention and invested dry facts with fictional life, while representing the past in collective terms. If he could revise his novel he would particularise historical truth, prioritising the individual soldiers' and civilians' tragedies over historical accuracy. To flesh out his remarks, Alyosha relates an autobiographically inspired story of a Soviet soldier who, disobeying both common sense and his superiors' orders, rescues a badly burnt Afghan child. He does so, we guess, in response to Faya's narrative of her experience during the blockade of Leningrad when, after she had lost her grandmother and her foster mother had turned to cannibalism, she was rescued by Red Army soldiers. Although Alyosha's newly found narrative strategy seems typically postmodern in that it focuses on *histories* rather than *History*, by failing to criticise the invading troops as we might expect from fiction that is revisionist in relation to Soviet historiography, his novel is largely consistent with the official representation of the conflict. Nor, despite appearances, does the book take the civilians' perspective, as have done some post-Soviet films on the Afghan conflict.⁵³ Instead, conveniently sidestepping all details of the incursion, the narrator underscores the Soviet soldier's compassionate attitude towards the enemy whom he figures as sly and ruthless. He also rationalises the Soviets' callous brutality, symptomatised

53 Gillespie, 'Defence of the Realm' (para. 13–22 of 39). As an example, the author quotes Vladimir Bortko's film *The Afghan Break* (1991), which shows 'wartorn landscapes, bombed out buildings, the killing of civilians, inadvertent and otherwise, and the destruction of peaceful villages. [...] [I]t is a picture of wasted young lives' (para. 15 of 39).

by the burns incurred by the child, by positing it as a natural response to the announcement of the troops' withdrawal: to ensure their own safe return home, soldiers would throw grenades into abandoned houses in case these were sheltering *mujahedeen*. Otherwise, as illustrated by an example of less prudent behaviour, one may come out of such a house with one's belly sliced open by a sword. That Alyosha does want to elicit his readers' sympathy for Soviet troops is confirmed by his description of his own wounds, both physical and mental. Vitally, since Alyosha suffers severe burns to his back, we are encouraged to identify his injuries with that of Afghan child and, by connotation, assimilate the Soviet soldier with the conflict's innocent victims. Then, to strengthen the effect created by the description of his horrific wounds, Alyosha describes his trauma:

Je venais en congé après neuf mois de service en Afghanistan. [...] Je marchais à travers Leningrad en évitant inconsciemment les endroits découverts. Au soleil je cherchais à dissimuler mon ombre dans celle d'un arbre ou d'une maison. Chaque bruit avait pour moi son double menaçant.

[After nine months' service in Afghanistan I was on leave. [...] As I walked through Leningrad I was unconsciously avoiding areas without cover. When the sun shone I would seek to hide my shadow within that of a tree or a house. Each sound I heard was the double of one that spelled danger.]

CPDD, 133

Alyosha's clearly calculated displacement of the reader's sympathy from the plight of the local population to that of the invader lays bare the ideological positioning of his depiction of the Soviet decade-long embroilment in Afghanistan. Given the novel's strongly autobiographical dimension, it is tempting to draw a parallel between the ethics of Alyosha's take on the Afghan war and that of Makine's representation of the Russo-German clash of 1941–1945. That such parallel can indeed be established transpires from the fact that Makine, as I have already demonstrated and will continue to do so throughout this book, is also keen to shift the focus away from Soviet war crimes and expansionism. Among the inconvenient historical facts that the Franco-Russian author shuns or at least treats dismissively are Stalin's pre-1941 collusion with Hitler, the 1939 Soviet attack on Finland, the rape and looting perpetrated by Soviet troops on their way to victory, or the slavery the USSR imposed on large chunks of Eastern and Central Europe as a result of its triumph over fascism. What remains to be investigated now is to what extent Alyosha's account of

his own and his parents' past reflects the author's own conception of the Great Fatherland War, and what sort of political message this account aims to transmit to Makine's Western readers.

If Alyosha's novel about his parents' wartime travails is metafictionally described as a result of a painstaking quest for personal truth, this quest is metaphorised as archaeological research, which implies a patient piecing-together of scattered artefacts, or as the work of an artist assembling a mosaic or painting a fresco. The first of the two images finds its concretisation in 'the Pit',⁵⁴ as the inhabitants of the redbrick estate call a World War II bomb crater periodically explored by the local children in search for revelations about the past. Described as 'mythique' ['mythical'] (*CPDD*, 38), the Pit stands for the buried truth about the war, which only young children's inquisitive minds still have the courage to probe. Aptly, the Pit serves the estate's men as a space where they violently resolve their disputes about the value of their participation in the war, or about Stalin's role in the victory. Likewise, children use it to restage famous battles between the Red Army and the Wehrmacht. The comparison of the curiosity stirred by the Pit in the children to that aroused by the origins of the world, and the description of the space as equally important and natural for the children as are the clouds, the moon or the sun, point to the Great Fatherland War's central place in the Soviet Union's both foundation saga and secular cosmology. As for the flowers growing over the Pit, they clearly symbolise the idealisation of the Great Victory under Khrushchev, while the artefacts yielded by the crater's base most likely stand for uncensored war memories. The gap between the expectations raised in the children by their military-political upbringing, and the unauthorised versions of the past, is expressed through the disappointment the young ones experience on digging up German rather than Soviet belongings. It is also not surprising that the authorities curb these private digs, which they do by exploding the Pit, thus, symbolically, regaining control over war memory. It is worth mentioning that the explosion restores the sanity of Zakharovna, who lost her mind when a bomb killed her son during the war. But, if this detail confirms the therapeutic potential of the re-enactment of the circumstances surrounding a traumatic experience, it also — and very disturbingly — implies that traumas can be effectively healed through a clampdown on personal memory.

The other image metaphorising Alyosha's meticulous research into the past is that of an artist creating a mosaic or painting a fresco:

54 In the area's name Gillespie sees a reference to Andrei Platonov's 1929 satirical novel *Kotlovan* (*The Pit*) whose title refers to the site where communism is to be built. Gillespie, 'Bartavels, Ortolans, and Borshch', p. 8.

J'entrepris alors [...] de composer une sorte de *fresque*, la *mosaïque* de cette jeunesse qui me fascinait. Jour après jour, j'ajoutais les *fragments* de[s] récits [de mon père], des confidences involontaires, des détails qui se révélaient au hasard de causeries avec ma mère.

[I then embarked [...] on constructing a kind of *fresco*, a *mosaic* of this youth that fascinated me. Day by day I added *fragments* from the stories [told by my father], unguarded confidences, details that emerged by chance in his chats with my mother.]

CPDD, 27–28, emphasis added

The afore-quoted passage once again underlines the fragmented and scattered character of the material at hand, and the resulting discontinuity of the narrative based upon this material. Additionally, the title of one of the three vignettes — ‘Fresque inachevée d’une jeunesse de guerre’ [‘Incomplete Mosaic of a Youth in the War’] (CPDD, 29) — points to the incompleteness and open-endedness of the narrated story. What is curious about the cited extract, however, is that it implies the interchangeability of the terms ‘*mosaïque*’ and ‘*fresque*’, which are synonymous only in so far as they are connected with architecture. Also, like murals and panoramas, which can also be translations of the French term ‘*fresque*’,⁵⁵ frescos and mosaics tend to be large-scale, decorate public spaces, and take up social, religious or patriotic themes. In this context, this supposedly accidental or ill-chosen synonymy could be telling, revealing the narrator’s objective of putting together, out of small pieces, a comprehensive portrait of the Great Fatherland War on the scale of a mural, a fresco or indeed a panorama. By narrating stories of four World War II survivors with very different experiences, *Confession* ends up creating an extensive and, as I will continue to argue, both ideologically-charged and highly selective image of the Soviet people’s wartime ordeal. Hence, my contention is that despite the typically postmodern poetics of fragment employed by Makine’s second novel, *Confession* ends up reiterating the Soviet state’s totalising message about national unity in the struggle against fascism, a message voiced with, among others, gigantic memorials and grandiose panoramas.⁵⁶

55 In his translation of *Confession*, Strachan uses ‘fresco’ and ‘mural’ interchangeably; however, I consider ‘panorama’ to be also highly, if not the most, appropriate.

56 Tumarkin notes that already during the war artists concocted ‘fanciful triumphal arches, vast columned pantheons, museums and monument ensembles whose scale and complexity of design make St. Basil’s Cathedral look like a dull and simple architectural creation by comparison.’ Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 83.

The Common Places: The Communal Apartment and Courtyard

In Makine's second novel, the overall sense of fragmentation is partly offset by the narrator's memories of communality whose sites are two symbolically-invested spaces: the communal apartment and its outdoor extension, the courtyard. While those memories evidently counter the narrator's exilic dependency, the stories of the Evdokimovs, the Zingers or Zakharovna show that the estate was also therapeutic for the generation of his parents. To demonstrate this, I will now analyse Makine's depiction of the two communal spaces, which I will do by framing them as figures of wholeness in the dialectic of unity/disunity structuring *Confession*. Following Boym's remark that 'the communal apartment was the actual Soviet microcosm, a nonidealised image of Soviet society in miniature',⁵⁷ or her comparison of Russia to 'a gigantic communal apartment with its many mysteries and secrets',⁵⁸ I will argue that for Makine the *kommunalka* is indeed a metaphor of the Soviet Union and, more generally, of inherently Russian *sobornost* which, as the novel intimates, has been compromised by the collapse of communism. More specifically, I will posit that Makine links the shared apartment to Russia's wartime memory, as well as to the Khrushchev era that, together with Brezhnev's Stagnation, has been missed in post-Soviet Russia as a future-oriented time of stability.⁵⁹

Introduced by Lenin shortly after the October Revolution, the *kommunalka* was a memory of the various forms of prerevolutionary collective living arrangements that had resulted from urban poverty and housing shortages.⁶⁰ It was also a clumsy implementation of the utopian dream of the house commune — introduced in the 1920s, to be abandoned in the 1930s — where kitchens and children were to be shared and relationships typical for a bourgeois family supplanted by proletarian comradeship.⁶¹ In reality, the communal apartment turned out to be a farce, 'a kind of mockery of ideal Soviet communality', while being 'an ideal place to look for actual everyday ways of Soviet communal living.'⁶² The *kommunalka* has also been described as 'an institution of

57 Boym, *Common Places*, p. 130.

58 *Ibidem*, p. 145. In 1924 I. Vareikis compared the Soviet Union to a large communal apartment in which 'national state units, various republics and autonomous provinces' represented 'separate rooms'. Quoted by Yuri Slezhkine, 'The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism', *Slavic Review*, 53.2 (Summer 1994), 414–52 (p. 415).

59 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, pp. 60–1.

60 Boym, *Common Places*, p. 129.

61 *Ibidem*, pp. 127–28.

62 *Ibidem*, p. 129.

social control, and the breeding ground of police informants',⁶³ while, quoting Lydia Ginzburg, Boym defines it as 'an institution of denial of human rights — right to air, to toilet, to space'.⁶⁴ Despite these and other negative evaluations of this 'revolutionary experiment in living'⁶⁵ by those with firsthand experience of this form of enforced communality,⁶⁶ Makine's novels, as my readings of *La Fille* and *Confession* will hopefully reveal, repeatedly hail the *kommunalka* as a continuation (or a revival) or the *mir*, whose principles were explained in Chapter 1, in the urban context, and, to borrow Boym's formulation, as 'an attempt to practice utopian ideologies and to destroy bourgeois banality'.⁶⁷

In *La Fille* the *kommunalka* turns out to be a haven for Ivan and Tatyana after the couple's unsuccessful attempt to construct a private life in Demidov's native village. Having abandoned their newly-built *izba*, which was the site of the death of their first child, the Demidovs move to town where they are given a room in a shared flat and where they are received into the fold of a surrogate extended family formed by their new neighbours. Such a positive valorisation of the couple's relocation goes against Erin Collopy's observation that moving into a communal apartment 'added to the overall sense of displacement and estrangement that any resettlement incurs'.⁶⁸ Likewise, contrary to testimonies of former dwellers of *kommunalkas*,⁶⁹ Makine shows the shared flat to be a place where class divisions and ethnic or generation differences are easily overcome, broken family life is repaired and past ordeals are forgotten. Just like in *Confession*, where Jews and Russians live happily side by side before becoming close friends, in *La Fille* the Demidovs (literally) rub shoulders with two ubiquitous Russian families — the young Fedotovs and the old Fedorovs —, as well as with Sophia Abramovna, a representative of the old Moscow intelligentsia and, as suggested by both her patronymic and trajectory, a Jew.⁷⁰ Even

63 *Ibidem*, p. 121.

64 *Ibidem*, p. 129. Cf. Erin Collopy, 'The Communal Apartment in the Works of Irina Grekova and Nina Sadur', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 6.2 (June 2005), 44–58 (p. 45).

65 Boym, *Common Places*, p. 124.

66 See, for example, Joseph Brodsky, 'In a Room and a Half', in *Less Than One: Selected Essays* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1986), pp. 447–501. Brodsky writes that the *kommunalka* 'bares life to its basics: it strips off any illusion about human nature ... You know the sounds they make in bed and when women have their periods.' (pp. 454–55).

67 Boym, *Common Places*, p. 125.

68 Collopy, p. 45.

69 Boym, *Common Places*, pp. 144–45. Boym, who is Jewish, remembers that in their Leningrad *kommunalka* she and her family were tantalised by their Gentile neighbours.

70 Abramovna is a victim of the late 1930s purges that, as many claim, targeted mainly Jews. See, for instance, William Korey, *The Soviet Cage: Anti-Semitism in Russia* (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), p. 67.

if the neighbours occasionally squabble over the use of the shared kitchen or bathroom, they always reconcile, as illustrated by this clichéd portrayal of noisy Russian sentimentality: 'ils se réconciliaient autour d'une table commune et, après avoir bu de la vodka, commençaient à s'embraser, à se jurer amitié et, les larmes aux yeux, à se demander pathétiquement pardon.' ['they would make it up around a communal table and, after drinking a few vodkas, would begin to embrace, swearing eternal friendship and abjectly begging one another's forgiveness with tears in their eyes.'] (*FHUS*, 53) As well as fostering egalitarianism, the *kommunalka* offers refuge to those whose lives have been shattered by prewar and wartime violence; while Sophia Abramovna's unspeakably terrible experience of the *gulag* can be inferred from her wondering gaze and the uncharacteristically foul language into which she occasionally lapses, the Fedorovs have been in limbo since their son went missing in action at the front. As for the Demidovs themselves, their recovery from their loss is indicated by the scene showing them dance in the courtyard to tangoes played on a gramophone. It is interesting to note that here Makine releases the gramophone from its negative postrevolutionary connotations by showing it to be a tool of communal entertainment rather than of individual pleasure.⁷¹ The couple's festive mood is additionally suggested by their attire — Ivan sports a jacket with all his medals and Tatyana her wedding blouse —, which connotes the two high points in their life: the Great Fatherland War and their marriage.

Despite the general perception of the *kommunalka* as a pathological element of Soviet life and the metaphor of the worst of the Soviet period,⁷² Makine persistently romanticises communal living. Like in *La Fille*, in *Confession* the shared flat enables the rebuilding of lives damaged by past ordeals, and, as nostalgically remembered by Alyosha, becomes a mental escape from the individualism and mercantilism he has known in the West. The familial atmosphere of the redbrick estate is foretold by the name of the town where it is located, Sestrovsk deriving from the Russian word for sister. Indeed, as if they were one big family, the neighbours embrace when they accidentally meet in nearby Leningrad. And even before they catch a glimpse of each other on the Nevsky Prospect, they recognise the characteristic clicking of the metal plates hammered on to the soles of their shoes by Alyosha's father. The communalism, as well as the self-proclaimed autonomy and intimacy of the housing estate, are also reflected by its peculiar architecture: three identical buildings

71 Together with rubber plants, geraniums and all other 'domestic trash', the gramophone was condemned by the communists as a token of pre-revolutionary bourgeois lifestyle and was therefore banned from post-revolutionary living spaces. Boym, *Common Places*, p. 38.

72 Collopy, p. 44.

with windows all apparently giving on the communal space flank a triangular courtyard.⁷³ While the *kommunalkas* themselves are filled with jolly noises of cooking or laundry, downstairs in the courtyard men play dominos, *babushkas* gossip, people watch films screened by the travelling cinema and children play on the swing or at war. The harmony reigning in the community is additionally hinted at by the narrator's metonymic use of 'toute la cour' ['the whole courtyard'] when he speaks of the estate's inhabitants (*CPDD*, 41), as well as by the comparison of the sounds and odours the estate exudes to a symphony:

Dès que [les joueurs de domino] commençaient à abattre leurs plaques avec un fracas assourdissant, la symphonie communautaire de la cour trouvait sa mesure. [...] Les fenêtres ouvertes déversaient leurs bourdonnements accompagnés de l'odeur douceâtre et savonneuse des grandes lessives. La vieille balançoire poussait un gémissement musical et mélancolique. Les cris des enfants invisibles dans la broussaille fusaient.

[As soon as [the domino players] began to slam down their pieces with a deafening din the communal symphony of the courtyard found its tempo. [...] The open windows spilled out their buzz, and with it came the sweetish, soapy smell of big washdays. The old swing groaned out its melancholy music. The shouts of invisible children pealed forth from among the bushes.]

CPDD, 20

Arnaud Vareille additionally remarks that Makine highlights the estate's solidarity and mutes the differences between the neighbours by grouping them as 'men', 'women' or '*babushkas*', that is on the basis of their age or gender: '[la] communion des êtres trouve son point d'orgue dans le fait que les humains ne sont mentionnés que par groupes établis en fonction du sexe ou de l'âge' ['the communion amongst the human beings finds its utmost expression in the fact that they are only ever mentioned as groups established on the basis of their gender or age'].⁷⁴

73 Cf. *Olga Arbélina* that features a former beer factory inhabited by Russian immigrants. Like Alyosha's estate, the fortress-like building is inward looking, which communicates the diaspora's insularity and contempt for its French hosts.

74 Arnaud Vareille, 'Du drame de devenir écrivain: *Confession d'un porte-drapeau déchu* d'Andrei Makine', in *Andrei Makine*, ed. by Clément (2009), pp. 37–53 (p. 39). My own translation.

Given the triangle's multivalent symbolism, including its signification of the three-in-one, the shape of the redbrick estate may in itself be worth exploring. While in Christianity the equilateral triangle is associated with the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, it can also represent the birth, the life and the death of a mortal man, or, alternatively, the father, mother and child. Communicating the idea of Oneness, all these meanings are pertinent to the redbrick estate, reflecting its familial quality and the fact that both the Evdokimovs and the Zingers are one-child families. Finally, the geometrical figure structuring the courtyard is also inscribed into the Star of David, a generally recognised symbol of Jewish identity composed of two interlaced triangles, one standing for spiritual and the other for physical perfection.⁷⁵ In this context, the courtyard's shape may be stating the Zingers' Jewishness and the Evdokimovs' Gentile identity, signified by the missing other triangle. While such a redrawing of the Star of David would suggest the perfect harmony reigning among the various ethnicities within the *kommunalka*, in the light of the total absence of references to Jewish culture and religion in Makine's novels, the intentionality of this allusion is questionable.

Pursuing my earlier suggestion that Makine assimilates the war and its memory with positive Russian national traits such as communality, I will now consider two episodes that remind the dwellers of the estate of wartime conditions. This is how the first of these episodes, which is the detonation of a bomb at the base of the Pit, is described.

On aurait dit que nous imitions une évacuation en temps de guerre. Les femmes portaient des petits sacs — un casse-croûte pour toute la famille. Les hommes soutenaient les babouchkas les plus décrépites. Les enfants, à qui les parents avaient mis, on ne savait pas pourquoi, des vêtements chauds, fronçaient les sourcils, heureux de paraître adultes. Oui, c'était une véritable évacuation.

[It looked as if we were simulating a wartime evacuation. The women carried little bags — emergency supplies for the whole family. The men assisted the most decrepit of the *babushkas*. The children, whose parents had made them wear warm clothes — no one knew why — frowned solemnly, happy to look grown up. Yet, it was a real evacuation.]

CPDD, 80

75 Allen H. Barber, *Celestial Symbols: Symbolism in Doctrine, Religious Traditions and Architecture* (Springfield: Horizon Publishers, 2006), pp. 31–5.

If the damage done by the explosion to the buildings and the courtyard calls to mind the effects of heavy shelling, the darkness and the cold that reign in the apartments after the broken windows have been boarded up remind their dwellers of wartime blackouts, or perhaps even, given Sestrovsk's proximity to the city on the Neva, of the failure of infrastructure in blockaded Leningrad. As for the children, they now feel they also have a past, which closes the gap between their generation and that of their parents who all knew the war. Finally, during the preparations for the explosion, as well as during the actual event and its aftermath, the neighbours are brought together in their shared hardship and effort, which evokes the idea of the unity of purpose allegedly created by the German invasion of 1941: 'On se mobilisa, s'entraida, se rapprocha au point de ne plus former qu'une grande famille, une tribu unie, énergique, animée d'une joyeuse volonté de survivre.' ['We set to work and helped one another, became so close that we simply formed *one big family*, a united, energetic tribe, motivated by a cheerful will to survive.'] (CPDD, 89, emphasis added) The other of the two episodes narrates a spell of particularly inclement weather, due to which the local bakery shuts down. An expedition to town is organised and then bread is distributed, one loaf per apartment. The situation once again appears to stir up memories of the war, and in particular of besieged Leningrad, where the already meagre daily bread ration at one point dropped to the legendary one hundred and twenty-five grams per person. This implicit allusion to the famine suffered by those caught up in the blockade is followed by an explicit reference to the war made by one *babushka*: '“Comme c'est bien tout ça! Tous ensemble. C'était comme ça pendant la guerre ...”' ['“This is all so good! All in it together. Just like in the war ...”'] (CPDD, 91) Finally, although this may seem a little far-fetched, it could be proposed that the estate's much lauded independence invokes the spirit of individual agency that reigned in wartime Russia, especially in encircled Leningrad whose inhabitants felt they owned their city's survival solely to themselves, rather than to Moscow.⁷⁶

The *kommunalka*'s positive significance is confirmed by Makine's two more recent novels, which trace the process of the reconsolidation of communal living spaces as a result of a 1994 law.⁷⁷ Like *Confession*, *L'Homme inconnu* and *Une femme aimée* situate the *kommunalka* at the intersection of war memory and familial atmosphere, and link its disappearance to the USSR's disintegration and the ensuing divisiveness of postcommunist society where the poor, and especially the elderly, have been suffering marginalisation. In *L'Homme*

76 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 252.

77 The law allowed for allowing for the privatisation and sale of individual rooms in shared apartments. *Ibidem*, p. 260.

inconnu the ramifications of the 1994 bill are illustrated with the story of Georgy Lvovich Volsky who, having survived the siege of Leningrad, sang under fire for the troops defending the city, and fought all the way to Berlin, finds himself evicted from his tiny room in a *kommunalka*, so that the flat may become an obnoxiously luxurious home to some New Russians. In a gesture opposing the 1917 dismemberment of individual apartments, the new rich join several communal dwellings, which they do with money earned, as Makine specifies, in shady deals and thanks to connections to the mafia and/or the power structures. The tasteless golden taps, crass marble floors and enormous plasma TV screens that tirelessly spew out stupefying images, jar with the shabbiness of Volsky's room where a bedridden paraplegic sips cold tea and reads a book as he is waiting to be transferred to an old people's home.

The same process is addressed by *Une femme aimée*, whose action spans the period from the very late 1970s to the beginning of the new millennium. The novel chronicles the transformation of Oleg Erdmann's seven-room apartment which the protagonist originally shares with fourteen other people and which he later remembers with nostalgia-tinged fondness: 'une cuisine commune, l'unique sale de bains. Un enfer quotidien, et pourtant on peut y être heureux' ['a shared kitchen. A single bathroom. A daily hell, yet one where you can be happy'] (UFA, 19). During *perestroika*, whose crashing force is metaphorised with one of the neighbour's death under the wheels of a train, the social matrix of Oleg's *kommunalka* changes as those more industrious move out to make room for society's poorest members. Among the latter is Gaya, a mother of three, whose husband has been serving a four-year sentence for having stolen a frozen chicken. Finally, after 1994, Oleg's flat is threatened by gentrification, as we can deduce from the two ominous-looking four-by-fours that have taken the space of the only tree growing in the communal courtyard.

Just like in his two earlier novels, in *L'Homme inconnu* and *Une femme aimée* Makine shows the chronotope of *kommunalka* to be a means of 're-familiarisation' rather than 'defamiliarisation',⁷⁸ as Boym calls the process of radically transforming the individualist bourgeois quarters,⁷⁹ so that the family unit could be restructured with the father being replaced by the state.⁸⁰ Indeed, both Ivan and Oleg who, characteristically, are orphans, find parental substitutes in the shared flats' elderly dwellers. The link between communal living

78 For Bakhtin, the chronotope expresses 'the inseparability of time and space'. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), p. 84.

79 Boym, *Common Places*, p. 127.

80 Collopy, p. 45.

and intrinsically Russian values and customs is additionally communicated in both texts through references to tea-drinking: while Volsky sips cold tea, Zoya's large kettle that dates back to the war, is the traditional *samovar*'s cheap successor. The fact that both Volsky and Zoya belong to the war generation places the *kommunalka* once again at the nexus of wartime memory and communality or, to use the Russian term, of *sobornost*, which Georges Nivat defines as 'la capacité à surmonter l'individuel tout en respectant la liberté de chaque personne.' ['the capacity to surmount one's individuality, while maintaining respect for another's personal freedom.']⁸¹ Finally, in both novels the *kommunalka* shelters the protagonist from the rampant capitalism raging in Russia's big cities and, in Shutov's case, also offers him a haven from the individualist and greedy West where he normally lives. Consequently, it is evident that Makine repeatedly identifies the communal apartment with the ideas of wholeness, togetherness, solidarity, tranquillity and familial atmosphere, although in reality it resulted from the dismemberment of private, full-size apartments into awkward, malfunctioning, often windowless nooks, separated from each other with flimsy partitions.⁸² Also, as Collopy points out, it abolished privacy while the shared kitchens made women feel additionally displaced, in patriarchal Russian society the kitchen being the women's place of power.⁸³

Charlotte, Put the *Samovar* on

Tracing a similar path to that of the *kommunalka*, in Makine's prose the *samovar*, as in the war's aftermath the Russians ironically called a multiple amputee, moves from fragmentation to plenitude, and it is precisely this reversal of the term's significance back to its original meaning that will occupy my attention in the present section. As we have seen from my discussion of *Confession*, the disabled veteran's social and professional reintegration, as well as the symbolic re-establishment of his bodily integrity and manhood, are repeatedly accomplished through communal living. If it is thanks to his wife Lyouba that Pyotr finds a new occupation and can thus once again serve his community and provide for his family, it is with the help of his neighbour Yakov Zinger that he climbs the stairs and then obtains an invalid car. The idea

81 Georges Nivat, *Vivre en Russe* (Geneva: L'Âge d'Homme, 2007), p. 31. My own translation. Nivat adds that the term *sobornost*, alongside *pravda* (the truth) and *narodnost* (national spirit), is a key one in understanding the Russian way of living and thinking, Russian culture and, finally, Russian separateness from the West.

82 Boym, *Common Places*, p. 126.

83 Collopy, p. 48.

of Pyotr's symbolic overcoming of his infirmity is reinforced by Makine's description of Evdokimov, who is maimed physically, and of Zinger who is traumatised by his experience of the Holocaust, as 'un seul homme — grand et fortement bâti' ['a single man — tall and well-built'] (*CPDD*, 109).

Far less upbeat about the fate of war invalids is *Le Testament* where the *samovars'* plight serves the author to bolster his critique of the Soviet regime's heartless treatment of those who ensured its survival by fighting Hitler. In Makine's fifth novel, the story of the multiple amputees is relayed by Charlotte who, as an outsider to Russia, has remained sensitive to and is willing to speak of this inconceivable cruelty and injustice. Yet, despite her supposed difference, Charlotte, who served as a frontline nurse in both world wars, shares the view of other Makinean characters that Russia's history is but 'une monotone suite de guerres, un interminable pansement de plaies toujours ouvertes' ['a monotonous succession of wars, an interminable dressing of ever-open wounds'] (*TF*, 142). As evidenced by metaphorical use of wounds in this quotation, Charlotte also partakes in other Makinean protagonists' understanding of military conflicts chiefly in terms of the injuries they inflict. Working at a hospital located near the frontline, the Frenchwoman spends her days receiving trainfuls of wounded soldiers: — 'ces trains remplis de chair humaine écharpée' ['these trains filled with torn human flesh'] (*TF*, 141) — and watching transports of enthusiastic and able-bodied men heading for the front. Needless to say, her nights are filled with nightmares featuring all kinds of wounds:

ce jeune fantassin à la mâchoire inférieure arrachée et dont la langue pendait sur les pansement sales, cet autre — sans yeux, sans visage ... Mais surtout ceux, de plus en plus nombreux, qui avaient perdu bras et jambes — horribles troncs sans membres, regards aveuglés par la douleur et le désespoir.

[the young infantryman with his lower jaw torn off and his tongue hanging out over dirty bandages; another — without eyes, without a face ... But chiefly all those, ever more numerous, who had lost both arms and legs — horrible limbless trunks, eyes blinded by pain and despair.]

TF, 141

Ultimately, it is her own husband's horrifically scarred body that Charlotte has to care for when Fyodor returns from the front in 1947, to die only a few months later. With this minor episode, Makine manifestly strives to challenge the state-sponsored narrative on the Great Victory; he does so by speaking of the war's protracted consequences, which Soviet authorities and, accordingly, historians did their best to ignore. Whereas in the official triumphalist discourse the war

ended with the Soviets' capture of Berlin, in reality hostilities continued for much longer, producing further casualties and injuries. This is illustrated not only by *La Fille* or *La Musique*, where Makine shows soldiers fighting after 9th May 1945 in Czechoslovakia or Austria, but also by *Le Testament* where Fyodor serves two more years in the Far East. Consequently, he enjoys neither the glory that befell the troops coming back right after the Victory nor the privileges of those who returned home in 1945:⁸⁴ 'Il était revenu quand les feux de la Victoire s'étaient depuis longtemps éteints. La vie reprenait son cours quotidien. Il revenait trop tard.' ['He had come home when the lights of Victory had long since gone out. Life was resuming its daily round. He was coming back too late.'] (*TF*, 150)

Apart from the official Soviet narrative of the Red Army's triumph over Hitler, with this episode Makine challenges classical cultural representations — both Soviet and foreign — of the soldier's homecoming. In such representations the returnee receives the hero's welcome from his nearest and dearest, and then enjoys a life of peace and prosperity, not to mention his community's enduring respect. Instead, self-consciously undermining the paradigm established by literature and cinema, *Le Testament* depicts Fyodor's return home as emotionless or even as dominated by silent awkwardness resulting from his four-year absence. By explicitly inscribing a certain narrative convention only to contest it, Makine's novel follows the pattern established by historiographic metafiction.⁸⁵ Yet, once again, the author has another agenda, which is to forestall any satisfaction we may feel at Fyodor's reunion with his wife, and thus to arouse our sympathy for the Soviet soldier who is denied any sort of reward for his wartime sacrifices.

Continuing to undermine the paradigm established by literature and cinema, the narrator notes that, had Fyodor knocked on the door, things would have been different:

Si Charlotte l'avait accueilli au seuil de la pièce, s'il avait ouvert la porte et était entré, comme elle imaginait cela depuis si longtemps, comme faisaient tous les soldats en revenant de la guerre, dans la vie ou dans les films, alors elle aurait sans doute poussé un cri, se serait jetée vers lui en s'agrippant à son baudrier, aurait pleuré ...

[If Charlotte had welcomed him on the threshold of the room, if he had opened the door and stepped inside, as she had pictured it for so long, as

84 Edele, 'Soviet Veterans as an Entitlement Group, 1945–1955', p. 125.

85 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. xii.

all the soldiers did when they came back from the war, in life or in films, then she would doubtless have uttered a cry, would have hurled herself at him, clinging to his shoulder belt, would have wept ...]

TF, 148

Instead of running towards each other, the couple walk at a normal pace and then, rather than falling into each other's arms, slowly head home together, calm and silent. Moreover, rather than a baldric, which Charlotte could have grasped, Fyodor is wearing a simple belt that apparently does not encourage physical contact between husband and wife:

Ils ne coururent pas, n'échangèrent aucune parole, ne s'embrassèrent pas. [...] Ils entrèrent en silence. Fiodor posa son sac sur un tabouret, voulu parler, mais ne dit rien, toussota seulement, en portant ses doigts aux lèvres. Charlotte se mit à préparer à manger.

[They did not run, they exchanged no words, they did not kiss. [...]] Fyodor put down his pack on a stool, made to speak, but said nothing, only cleared his throat, bringing his fingers to his lips. Charlotte began to prepare a meal.

TF, 149

Finally, while Fyodor's silence or his gesture of putting his fingers to his lips can be ascribed to the uneasiness of the reunion, they can also be interpreted as the author's unstated comment about the unspeakability of the soldier's frontline experience in the face of the expectations of those who spent the war at the rear. Such an interpretation is invited by the fact that several other Makinean heroes struggle to accommodate their distressing wartime memories to the sanitised version of the war, and, in order to stay out of trouble, keep quiet about what they lived through at the front.

Unable or reluctant to relate his story verbally, Fyodor bares his atrociously scarred body — 'ce corps méconnaissable, on eût dit déchiré par les rouages d'une machine [...], un corps lacéré de blessures' ['this unrecognisable body, as if torn by the wheels of a machine [...], [a] body [...] lacerated with wounds'] —, which eloquently, albeit wordlessly, narrates his ordeal, proving particularly meaningful to a frontline nurse familiar with every possible type of wound (*TF*, 151):

Ce corps était celui d'un homme que [Charlotte] ne connaissait pas. Un corps criblé de cicatrices, de balafres — tant profondes, aux bords

charnus, comme d'énormes lèvres voraces, tant à la surface lisse, luisante, comme la trace d'un escargot. Dans une des omoplates, une cavité était creusée — Charlotte savait quel genre de petits éclats griffus faisaient ça. Les traces roses des points de suture entouraient une épaule, se perdant dans la poitrine ... [...] Un des sourcils de Fiodor portait une large entaille blanche qui, s'amincissant, lui barrait le front.

[This body was of a man she did not know. A body riddled with scars, with gashes — some of them deep, with fleshy edges, like huge voracious lips, some with a smooth, shiny surface, like a snail's trail. In one of the shoulder blades a cavity had been dug: Charlotte knew what type of little jagged shell splinters did that. The pink traces of the stitches of a suture surrounded one shoulder losing themselves in his chest ... [...] Across one of Fyodor's eyebrows there was a broad white gash which, as it grew narrower, made a line across his forehead.]

TF, 151

The final scar described by the extract supports my earlier comment about Fyodor's difficulty in readjusting to postwar reality. Barring his forehead, the slash gives the veteran a permanently surprised expression, as if, having spent four years at the front, he were unable to resume his prewar life or even longed for his frontline existence. That Fyodor shares other Makinean protagonists' nostalgia for the front can also be inferred from the fact that he keeps using his bayonet to cut bread and, ultimately, from his untimely death. One last remark that I wish to make about this scene concerns the already-mentioned infantilisation of the wounded soldier, which is suggested here by Fyodor's child-like passivity as Charlotte bathes him in a tub described as '*la petite baignoire d'enfant*' ['the little *child's* bath'] (*TF*, 150, emphasis added).

Fyodor's tragedy acts as a post-scriptum to Charlotte's story about the *samovars* who, like Evdokimov, are reduced to begging and move about in homemade wheelchairs. Frustrated and possibly drunk, they engage in bloody knife-fights and it is as a consequence of such incidents that the authorities deport them to a remote island where they are housed in a former leper hospital. Placed in the context of popular attitudes towards leprosy across centuries, the choice of such lodgings communicates the Soviet state's conception of the war invalids as unclean undesirables who represent a threat to the *status quo* and must therefore be removed from society.⁸⁶ And, as if this enforced

86 Bryon Lee Grigsby, *Pestilence in Medieval and Early Modern Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 39–102.

isolation was not enough, shortly after their deportation the *samovars* mysteriously disappear from the island. It is worth adding that the *samovars*' story is grounded in reality⁸⁷ and that, prior to *Le Testament*'s publication, it became subject of literature.⁸⁸

Defined by Makine as 'cette âme meurtrie' ['this tortured soul'] or as 'une âme happée par un morceau de chair désarticulé, un cerveau détaché du corps, un regard sans force englué dans la pâte spongieuse de la vie' ['a soul imprisoned in a lump of amputated flesh; a brain detached from its body, a feeble gaze trapped in the spongy stuff of life'] (*TF*, 144), the *samovar* — at least semantically — destabilises the term's original positive meaning. Namely, the Russian tea-making device is connoted to communal tea-drinking, hospitality, conviviality and prosperity. Instead, the *samovar* becomes shorthand for solitude, destitution, disintegration, exile and, ultimately, death. If the story of the multiple amputees narrated by *Le Testament* corroborates the authorities' already-mentioned intention to distance themselves from the body-injuring activities of the war, it also supports Tumarkin's more culturally specific remark that the war-wounded spoiled the state-propagated heroic image of the Great Victory.⁸⁹ To Tumarkin's comment one can add Gudkov's observation that the *samovars* were perceived not only by the regime but also by ordinary Russians as 'burdensome and unnecessary':

they were left to the mercy of fate, people were ashamed of them, turned away from them, hid them with an unpleasant feeling of guilt and sense of the ugliness of life — everything was done to keep them out of the official gala picture of peace-time life.⁹⁰

Echoing the afore-cited opinions, this is how Alyosha himself explains the state's decision to clear the *samovars* from the big cities: 'ils offraient une

87 As part of Stalin's postwar policy to stop people from dwelling upon the war or at least upon its horrors, the amputees were sent off to colonies in the far north to live out the rest of their days. Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 98.

88 In 1982 Yury Nagibin devoted a novella entitled *Patience* to the fate of multiple amputees. During a visit to a northern island thirty years after the war, Anna, the novella's central character, meets her former fiancé whom she believed to have died at the front. Pasha is one of the war invalids living in a monastery and selling roots from the forest to tourists. Missing both legs, he moves on wooden blocks attached to his hands and it is in such a way that he makes a fourteen-kilometre trip to meet the tourist ships docking on the island. See Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, pp. 98–9.

89 *Ibidem*, p. 100.

90 Gudkov.

mauvaise image de la grande Victoire. Le soldat [...] on le préfère ou bien brave et souriant ou bien ... mort au champ d'honneur.' ['they were giving the Great Victory a bad image. [...] [P]eople like a soldier either to be gallant and smiling or else ... dead on the field of honour.'] (TF, 261)

Whereas David Gillespie speculates that the *samovars'* story serves Makine to underscore the Soviet state's merciless attitude towards those who lost their health in the war, and to illustrate the Westerners' inability to grasp Russia's cruel ways,⁹¹ I will add to this that Alyosha evokes the multiple amputees to shame his own generation and teach them a lesson in patriotism. And, because *Le Testament* is destined for Western rather than Russian consumption, I argue that the key function of the *samovars'* story is political and that Makine wants to boost his readers' both respect and sympathy for the Soviet soldier. That this is indeed the author's design is implied by the analogy between an invalid and a leper who, according to Sheldon Watts, is a medium for good deeds and salvation and could therefore be seen as 'a representative of Christ offering opportunities for Christian charity'.⁹² The Soviet soldier is thus yet again transformed into a Christ-like figure, whereby Makine's writing only confirms its indebtedness to the long-standing tradition of likening Russia to the 'humiliated but enlightened' Christ,⁹³ which during and after World War II was mobilised by the self-congratulatory discourse on the Soviet Union's liberating mission in regard to the enslaved peoples of Europe. What this means is that, ultimately, the *samovar* is drained of its sarcastic meaning in order to emblematised the myth of Soviet self-sacrifice and heroism. Meant to help Alyosha rally the post-war generation around the myth of the Great Victory and, indirectly, feed this myth to the Western public, the figure of the multiple amputee acquires the potential to consolidate the Russian nation and convince the West about the Soviet Union's uniquely positive role in the war. Consequently, the *samovar* comes full circle back to being the symbol of togetherness and wholeness. In this way, Makine's prose once more unsettles the pattern of historiographic metafiction which, rather than reinstalling the concepts it sets out to critique, as does the Franco-Russian author, critiques the notions it installs.

91 Gillespie, 'Bartavels, Ortolans, and Borshch', p. 18.

92 Sheldon J. Watts, *Epidemics and History: Disease, Power and Imperialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 52. Quoted by Grigsby, p. 50.

93 Rancour-Laferrière, *The Slave Soul of Russia*, p. 3.

Requiem for the Lost Empire

Like *Confession* or *Le Testament*, *Requiem*, which is the last novel to be discussed in this chapter, is also structured by the dialectic of unity and fragmentation, which, like in the earlier texts, is concretised with both the war's corporeal effects and the Soviet Union's break-up. Even if *Requiem's* central historical reference point is World War II, in this novel Makine's ambition is to cover the USSR's entire history, from the Civil War following the October Revolution, to the empire's collapse in 1991. Typically, *Requiem* personalises the past by narrating it through stories of individuals: the nameless narrator, his father, Pavel, and his grandfather, Nikolai. Equally characteristically, Makine focuses on the destructive effect, including that on the human body, of the various military conflicts punctuating Russia's twentieth-century history. In the remaining part of this chapter, I will therefore pursue my analysis of Makine's representation of war injuries, continuing to frame my discussion with both Foucault's theory of the body as an inscriptive surface exposed to the violence of power regimes, and Butler's commentary on the French philosopher's theory.

The first injuries that we come across in *Requiem*, whose story vacillates between different narrative frames and is scattered with temporal ellipses, are the ones belonging to the protagonist-narrator's direct experience of Soviet-sponsored insurgencies, such as those in South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Angola, Mozambique, South Yemen, Nicaragua or, finally, Afghanistan. Spying under the cover of a military surgeon, one day the protagonist operates on a soldier who, having had his both arms amputated, commits suicide by throwing himself into the line of fire. If this incident is quickly erased from the protagonist's memory by the next day's surgery (two men with serious burns and another amputation), the overall weight of his wartime trauma can only be drowned in morphine. Another image that lingers in the spy's memory is that of peacocks slain by insurgents, which, like Berg's memory of a squirrel tormented to death by restless soldiers in *La Musique*, or Pavel's memory of a dog wounded by shrapnel, signifies gratuitous and arbitrary violence whose targets are innocent and vulnerable creatures. Yet, the most memorable injury haunting *Requiem's* protagonist seems to be the already-invoked adolescent's arm torn off by a rocket and positioned next to a destroyed armoured vehicle. As I argued in Chapter 1, acting like the Barthesian *punctum* that is a socially and culturally incommunicable sign capable of touching or even mortifying the viewer, the severed arm humanises the tank, whose torn electric cables are compared to blood vessels, and the blood-splattered dashboard to an exploded brain. The vehicle is also figured as 'un être insolite' ['a rare creature'] or as 'une bête de guerre futuriste' ['a futuristic war beast'] (*RE*, 24), which can be

regarded as an allusion to the Foucauldian concept of the docile body. This is because the concept had been inspired by the Cartesian notion of body-as-machine and by Julien Offray La Mettrie's idea of 'l'Homme-machine', which Foucault subsequently described as 'une réduction matérialiste de l'âme et une théorie de dressage, au centre desquelles règne la notion de "docilité" qui joint au corps analysable le corps manipulable.' ['a materialist reduction of the soul and a general theory of *dressage*, at the centre of which reigns the notion of "docility", which joins the analysable body to the manipulable body.]⁹⁴ The personification of the armoured vehicle thus corroborates Foucault's analysis of the body's docility being converted into usefulness, where the body, having been exposed to the coercive and violent manifestations of power regimes, becomes alienated and machine-like: 'un corps qui peut être soumis, qui peut être utilisé, qui peut être transformé et perfectionné.' ['a] body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved.'⁹⁵

Like *Requiem*'s narrator, rather than as dates of battles or commanding officers' names, which are deemed important by canonical history, both Nikolai and Pavel remember the wars they fought in as a string of horrific injuries. Once again foregrounding animal suffering and at the same time parodying Tolstoy's 1886 novella *Kholstomer: The Story of a Horse*,⁹⁶ Makine describes the Civil War of 1918–1922 by focalising it through Nikolai's exceptionally intelligent horse, Fox. As Makine's equine narrator highlights the plight of his fellow horses, emphasis is shifted away from humans. This goes against any official record of fighting, and, consequently, just as does the extract's Tolstoyan prototype, creates a defamiliarising effect, unsettling the readers' expectations of a war novel:

Sur ces routes de guerre, Renard avait vu des chevaux qui se noyaient et des chevaux déchirés par des obus, et cet étalon avec les pattes de devant arrachées et qui essayait de se relever dans un saut monstrueux, et cet attelage abandonné dans la tourbe profonde d'un marais: les chevaux s'enlisaient de plus en plus, prisonniers d'un canon inutile. Et cet officier blanc, la corde au coup, qu'un cheval traînait par terre en accélérant sous les coups de fouet et le braillement des soldats.

94 Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, p. 138.

95 *Idem*.

96 Tolstoy's novella has famously been used by Victor Shklovsky to illustrate the practice of defamiliarisation. Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', trans. by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, in *Russian Formalist Criticism*, ed. by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 3–24.

[Along the trails of war Fox had seen horses drowning and horses ripped apart by shells, a stallion with his front legs torn off attempting to stand up in a monstrous leap, and a team abandoned in the peaty depths of a bog: the horses sinking deeper and deeper, prisoners of a useless gun. And a White officer, a rope around his neck, being dragged along the ground by a horse gathering speed under the blows of a whip and the bawling of soldiers.]

RE, 113

Similarly, Makine's representation of the wartime experience of Nikolai's son begins with the image of animal rather than human suffering, as Pavel watches a wounded dog writhing in pain, his eyes filled with incomprehension and tears. Even though this memory proves stronger than that of killed or wounded comrades, Pavel still relates the polymorphous injuries he came across at the Eastern Front and whose great number and variety meant that 'aucun corps meurtri, déchiré, morcelé ne devait plus le surprendre par la fantaisie des mutilations.' ['no massacred, broken, dismembered body could any longer surprise him with the capriciousness of its mutilations.'] (RE, 150) To exemplify these mutilations, the narrator brings up the image of two wounded soldiers, each from a different camp, whereby Makine again underscores his protagonists' capacity for humanising or even sympathising with the enemy. Having said that, Makine quickly reasserts the Russians' moral superiority over the Germans, which he does by contrasting the two soldiers' reactions to their torment: whereas the former, who has lost his sight, dies a heroic death by throwing himself under a tank, a grenade in his hand, the latter is helplessly wailing in a child-like voice. The narrator then describes his own father's injury that leaves Pavel's mud-spattered body lying on the ground, arms outstretched, his head flung back towards the sky. The description echoes that of Demidov's injury, especially that Makine here too has a nurse place her pocket mirror against the lips of the apparently dead soldier. By styling the scene on the Pietà and, as he does in *Le Fille*, likening Pavel's miraculous return to life to the Resurrection, Makine reaffirms the already-evoked idea of the Soviet troops' Christ-like self-sacrifice.

It seems that by stating that '[t]uer, détruire, la guerre était faite pour ça' ['[k]illing and destruction was what war was all about'] (RE, 110), *Requiem* takes to task the 'gala version' of the events of the war,⁹⁷ and, more universally, contradicts any historiographic account of a military conflict. Yet, the endless litany of war wounds rattled off by the novel has, as I will contend in the final

97 Gudkov.

pages of this chapter, another — and perhaps more important — aim, which is to reinscribe a positive image of Soviet Russia in the eyes of Makine's intended audience. That this is indeed the case transpires from the fact that it is with the images wounded of Soviet soldiers that the novel's narrator hopes to counter the aggressively scornful attitudes towards his homeland, with which he has been meeting since his defection to the West. During one cultural event, at which he is present, Russia is compared to 'un cadavre' ['a corpse'], 'un fantôme' ['a phantom'], or 'un trou noir qui engloutit tout ce qu'on n'y jette' ['a black hole that swallows up everything thrown into it'], while the Russians themselves are described as 'allergiques à la démocratie' ['allergic to democracy'] (*RE*, 203–4). The memory of the Great Fatherland War is also defiled when the protagonist's former KGB mentor and a veteran of the battle of Kursk is unfairly accused of treason. Worse still, Western intellectuals blame the slowness of the Red Army's counteroffensive for the excessive number of deaths in German concentration camps. To refute these — in his view — slanderous allegations, the narrators brings up the story of the quasi-suicidal storm on one of these camps, in which his own father took part and during which six punishment battalions were almost completely wiped out.

It is perhaps to make his enterprise of rehabilitating the Soviet Union more accessible to his prospective readers that Makine inscribes the documentary *Le Prix du retard* into a more general trend, exemplified in the French context by the 'Vichy syndrome', as Henry Rousso has called France's efforts to deal with its wartime collaboration with the Germans, and in particular with its shameful role in the annihilation of some seventy thousand Jews living on French territory. Just as he resents any questioning of Russia's exclusively positive role in the war, *Requiem's* narrator lampoons those who dare interrogate the resistentialist myth, according to which France was a nation of heroic fighters and which, forged by de Gaulle, was very much de rigueur until the late 1960s: 'Tantôt, c'était le visage faussement contrite d'un évêque qui fondait dans la repentance. Tantôt, les policiers, en pénitents inconsolables, demandaient pardon pour les erreurs de leurs collègues d'il y a un demi-siècle.' ['First it was the spuriously contrived face of a bishop collapsing into repentance. Next the police, like inconsolable penitents, asking forgiveness for the errors of their colleagues half a century ago.'] (*RE*, 225) Similarly harmful to historical consciousness is, implies the narrator, *Le Prix du retard* that directly translates the Red Army's purported sluggishness into the number of concentration camps victims. Although claiming to offer but raw historical material, the film, the narrator argues, has a strong political bias, as well as pecuniary motivations. To achieve its dubious goals, the documentary, we are told, manipulates its audience with ingenuous cinematic techniques, such as dividing the screen into

two, one side showing Soviet soldiers eating, sleeping, laughing, smoking or dancing and singing to the sounds of a *garmoshka*, the other being filled with prisoners' stripy uniforms, skeletal bodies, heaps of corpses and crematorium chimneys puffing out smoke. It seems that in condemning this documentary, Makine aspires to settle scores with anyone who dares mention any hard truths related to his homeland's participation in the war, as exemplified by the Western intellectuals who question the number of Soviet war victims, mention the German-Soviet non-aggression pact that carved up Poland and the Baltic States, or evoke the 1940 Katyń massacre of Polish officers that the Soviets for decades blamed on the Germans. More specifically, it appears that the critique of *Le Prix du retard* is a thinly-veiled attack on those who accuse the Soviets of having deliberately idled for some forty days on the east bank of the Vistula, while the Germans quashed the Warsaw Uprising, the Poles' last hope for saving their country from a Soviet-imposed government.⁹⁸ To heighten the effect of his writing, Makine transforms the Polish capital into a camp whose capture could only be achieved at the loss of entire units, and the National Army (*Armia Krajowa*) insurgents, who had a good chance of succeeding had the Soviets acted like the allies they were supposed to be and not sat on their hands, into helpless victims of Nazi anti-Jewish violence. Finally, under Makine's pen the Vistula transmogrifies into a moat filled with decomposed bodies and human ashes, whose sight is too repulsive even to battle-hardened troops. Although well accustomed to the sight of blood and an infinite diversity of wounds, the soldiers who have witnessed 'la résistance des corps qui, démembrés, déchi-quetés, aveuglés, s'agrippaient à la vie' ['the resistance of bodies that, though dismembered, mangled, blind, still clung to life'], hesitate before plunging into the waters of the repugnant river (*RE*, 224).

Launching a counterattack, the narrator dismisses the criticism voiced by *Le Prix du retard* as immaterial in the face of Soviet sacrifices, exemplified by the Red Army's afore-analysed Pyrrhic victory at the camp. Importantly, the scene in which hundreds of soldiers perish to save a handful of prisoners can be identified as, to borrow Gregory Carleton's formulation, an 'annihilation narrative', which has been 'a prominent lens in [recent] popular culture for portraying and commemorating World War II in Russia.'⁹⁹ While rooting this narrative mode in Russian cultural tradition, showing its applicability to other conflicts such as Chechnya or Afghanistan, and inscribing it into the

98 Hugo Service, *Germans to Poles: Communism, Nationalism and Ethnic Cleansing After the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 48.

99 Carleton, 'Victory in Death', p. 136.

cultural production 'of a new-Stalinist bent',¹⁰⁰ Carleton reads it, significantly, as a Christian parable, for it taps into 'a myth of exceptionalism that anticipates and rewards death'.¹⁰¹ As will become apparent in the next chapter, Christian resonances can indeed be discerned in the scene describing the Red Army's costly capture of the concentration camp; for now, however, it needs to be stressed that the episode's key objective is to demonstrate that Soviet troops not only did not drag their feet but also died in throngs in order to save the very Jews of whose death they are being unfairly accused.

Denouncing revisionist history, *Requiem's* narrator calls the Western intellectuals 'hypnotiseurs de la mémoire' ['hypnotists of memory'] who lie and distort truth about the past, and in the process of doing so generate oblivion rather than commemoration (*RE*, 228). To discredit their endeavours further, the former spy establishes an analogy between *Le Prix du retard* and the football match watched by the janitor of the building where the screening takes place. If, according to Clément, this simile implies that both programmes provide entertainment,¹⁰² I will refine this point by adding that, by likening the documentary to a sporting event, Makine insinuates that the former promotes excitement, hostility and anger, and that it raises adrenaline levels in a situation where a group of people (the Westerners) unite against a common enemy (the Russians).¹⁰³ Indeed, when the narrator starts exposing all but academic motivations for the documentary's anti-Soviet prejudice, we learn that the film's director systematically seeks out contentious and sensationalist subjects. The narrator then learns that the film has been financed by Ron Scalper, the rogue arms dealer who, as elucidated in Chapter 1, is also blamed for fuelling intertribal violence. Predictably, Scalper's incentives turn out to be mainly of economic nature: by persuading the public opinion that it was the Western Allies who defeated fascism and that, consequently, only Americans can be trusted to save the world, he strives to boost the sales of US-manufactured weapons. As for its ideological underpinning, the documentary, as the narrator tries to persuade us, is intent on downplaying the importance of the Eastern Front and to ultimately reduce the war to Hitler's rabid Judeophobia, which, as we will see in Chapter 4, Makine himself considers an insignificant aspect of World War II. To summarise, the narrator's tirade against Western opportunism in the face of the post-1991 weakening of Russia's position, which is symptomatised by *Le Prix du retard*, can be inscribed into the strongly anti-Western — not to

100 *Ibidem*, p. 137.

101 *Ibidem*, p. 157.

102 Clément, *Andreï Makine: L'Ekphrasis dans son oeuvre*, p. 85.

103 Robert Lawlor, *Earth Honoring: the New Male Sexuality* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1991), pp. 18–19.

say paranoiac — tone of Makine's prose that systematically casts Russia as a victim of Western malevolence and treachery.

With his analysis of *Le Prix du retard*, *Requiem*'s narrator implies that history is always (re-)written by the victors and from the vantage point of the present, which means that it reflects the current political situation and configuration of power. The narrator thus echoes contemporary philosophy of history and takes up some of the tropes pursued by historiographic metafiction. He also aligns his position with that of many postmodern novelists when criticising the film's totalising vision of the past. More specifically, he maintains that the makers of the documentary have deprived both the camps' inmates and their liberators of identity, reducing them to sheer numbers: 'À présent, [les prisonniers et les soldats] étaient commodément groupées dans ces millions anonymes, une armée de morts qu'on exposait sans cesse dans les grands bazars d'idées.' ['Now [the prisoners and the soldiers] were conveniently assembled into these anonymous millions, an army of the dead that was constantly being paraded about in the great bazaars of ideas.'] (*RE*, 225) To what he considers to be a reductive, ideologised, unfair and partisan view of the Soviet role in the war, the narrator opposes his own version of events, which foregrounds the sacrifice of his father and his Jewish comrade during the storm on a concentration camp. Although, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, Makine's take on Marelst's story does injustice to members of punishment battalions and Jewish fighters alike, for it exploits the two groups' heroism for alien political ends, the narrator vindicates his approach by underlining its particularising effect: 'au temps de leur martyre et de leur mort, chacune des [victimes] avait un visage, un passé, un nom que même l'immatriculation tatouée à leur poignet [*sic*] n'avait pas réussi à effacer.' ['at the time of their martyrdom and their death each of [the victims] had a face, a past, that not even the special number tattooed to their wrists [*sic*] had succeeded in obliterating.'] (*RE*, 225) With this pronouncement the narrator insinuates the destructive power of the Western discourse to be greater than that of the Nazi programmes of Extermination through Labour (*Vernichtung durch Arbeit*) and the Final Solution of the Jewish Question (*Endlösung der Judenfrage*), actualised through the chain of concentration and extermination camps. That such is indeed the narrator's intention is verified by his profoundly shocking comment that he would have found it easier to find common ground with the German capturer of the Brest-Litovsk Fortress, whom he shows capable of manifesting respect for the courage of a dying Soviet soldier, than with Western intellectuals.¹⁰⁴

104 The Brest-Litovsk fortress was besieged by the Germans for a month until they captured it in July 1941. During the 1970s the tragic defeat was transformed into an exploit of heroic defence, which is how Makine himself portrays it when describing the Germans'

Conclusions

The countless description of war injuries filling the pages of Makine's fiction create the impression that the author's intention is to contradict the triumphalist Soviet narrative on the war, which deliberately and systematically obscured the destructive effect of combat on the human body. This impression is reinforced by Makine's use of narrative strategies such as discontinuity or self-reflexivity, which in historiographic metafiction serve the reclaiming of the denied aspects of history, especially when this history has been sponsored by oppressive regimes. The radical nature of the Franco-Russian author's prose is additionally confirmed by its outright condemnation of the Soviet government's merciless attitude towards maimed veterans, such as Semyonov, Evdokimov or the so-called *samovars*. The writer's criticism of the Soviet regime appears yet more disparaging when illuminated with Foucault's theory of the asymmetrical and destructive state-citizen relationship which, as Makine's novels illustrate, affect both the body politic and individual bodies. It is the French philosopher's concept of a body disciplined into docility and, ultimately, utility, that proves particularly relevant to the war that Stalin ran ruthlessly in regard not only to the enemy but also his own troops. Finally, as in Foucauldian theory, in Makine's prose, the body is historically constructed, in that it is interlaced by the regime's propagandist language.

However, even if the author of *Le Testament* shares Foucault's ambition to indict coercive and violent regimes which survey, control, shape, subjugate and effectively destroy the citizen's body, it is, as I have argued in this chapter, but his ancillary objective. One of the primary motivations behind the scores of mutilated bodies staged by Makine's prose is to arouse Western readers' compassion for Soviet soldiers and, by extension, for the Soviet Union itself. That a metonymic transfer operates between the individual and the state transpires from Makine's use of amputations as the trope for the USSR's dismemberment in the wake of the fall of communism. Consequently, by having the capacity to evoke the moment in Russia's twentieth-century history, which for over forty years had the capacity to consolidate and fill with pride the Soviet people, and which has recently been appropriated by Putin's politics with the same unifying and ego-boosting objective, the torn-apart body reverses the dialectical

admiration for the Soviet soldiers' resilience and patriotism (*RE*, 164–65). For more on the transformation of a tragedy into a heroic tale, see Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, pp. 145–46.

movement from wholeness to splitting that normally accompanies wounding. Instead, ceasing to be a locus of loss, fragmentation and destruction, in Makine's novels the wounded men become *samovar*-like figures, who connote communality, conviviality, historical continuity and tradition, but who in this become exploited for, paradoxically, more or less the same political ends as were those of the Soviet demagogues who earlier sentenced them to oblivion.

The Jew: Between Victimhood and Complicity, or How an Army-Dodger and Rootless Cosmopolitan Has Become a Sainly Ogre

There has never been and there is no anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union.

ALEXANDER KOSYGIN¹



Introduction

It is hardly possible to write about the 1941–1945 conflict between Stalin's Russia and Hitler's Germany without mentioning the Jewish experience in a war that, as Kiril Feferman claims, was 'the Jews' war', the Nazis' principal enemy being Judeo-Bolshevism.² Indeed, when Germany invaded the USSR in June 1941 Soviet Russia boasted the largest Jewish diaspora in Europe³ and, as in other countries conquered by Hitler's army, in the German-occupied parts of the USSR Jews became the prime target of Nazi violence. Having been rounded up into ghettos, they were either shot after digging their own graves or, less frequently, transported to concentration or extermination camps. Jews were also the victims of the worst genocide that the Germans carried out on Soviet soil: in September 1941 at Babi Yar, a huge wooded ravine on the outskirts of Kiev, over thirty-three thousand men, women and children were killed within two days. Yet, in the Soviet context, Jewish wartime history goes beyond the Holocaust, as some half a million Jews fought in both the Red Army and

1 Chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers 1964–1980.

2 Kiril Feferman, "The Jews' War": Attitudes of Soviet Jewish Soldiers and Officers towards the USSR in 1940–41, *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 27.4 (2014), 574–90 (p. 574).

3 It is estimated that three million Jews were living within the pre-1939 borders of the Soviet Union and five million after the Soviet Union's 1939 annexation of Eastern Poland. See *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture*, vol. 3, ed. by M. Avrum Erlich (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009), p. 114.

partisan units.⁴ Not only that, but many Jews occupied high-ranking positions⁵ and became distinguished with the highest Soviet orders, including the Gold Star of the Hero of the Soviet Union.⁶ Despite these statistics, both Jewish soldiers and Holocaust victims have been entirely absent from, have marginal presence in, are treated indirectly or are even vilified by Soviet cultural representations of World War II.⁷ Such a situation only reflected the official Soviet policy on the Jewish war experience; without denying the Holocaust or accusing Jewish soldiers of cowardice, the Shoah was, as Catherine Merridale puts it, 'the most ominous of the silences at official ceremonies of commemoration',⁸ as state-controlled historiography programmatically submerged Jewish suffering and heroism into the general Soviet victories and losses of the Great Fatherland War.⁹

Whereas the very strict (self-)censorship to which works published in Soviet Russia were necessarily submitted can be partly blamed for the literary misrepresentations of Jewish wartime experience,¹⁰ it can hardly justify the conspicuously derisory role that Makine's novels, all published in the West and in any case already when the Soviet system was crumbling or had already collapsed, assign to Soviet Holocaust victims and Jewish combatants. It could even be postulated that by minimising the Jews' presence in his oeuvre, Makine, on the

4 *Ibidem.*, p. 948.

5 For example, there were three hundred and five Jewish generals. Yitzhak Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner: Soviet Jews in the War against Nazi Germany* (Jerusalem: Gefen Books, 2010), p. 6.

6 *Ibidem*, p. 24. See also Gershon Shapiro, *The Stories of Jewish Heroes of the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1988). The exact number of Jewish Heroes of the Soviet Union varies from source to source, oscillating around the figure of one hundred and fifty.

7 For a discussion of the underrepresentation of the Holocaust in Soviet literature, see, for example, Lukasz Hirszowicz, 'The Holocaust in the Soviet Mirror', in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Soviet Jews in the Nazi-Occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941–1945*, ed. by Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey Gurock (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. 29–59; or Benjamin Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews, 1948–1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 387–420. For an analysis of the Shoah in Soviet film, see Olga Gershenson, *The Phantom Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and Jewish Catastrophe* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013).

8 Merridale, *The Night of Stone*, p. 292. Cf. Carleton, 'Victory in Death', p. 139.

9 See, for example, Zvi Gitelman, 'History, Memory and Politics: The Holocaust in the Soviet Union', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 5.1 (1990), 23–37.

10 Such an explanation is offered by Gary Rosenshield in his analysis of Anatoly Rybakov's 1978 novel about Jewish life and the Holocaust. Gary Rosenshield, 'Socialist Realism and the Holocaust: Jewish Life and Death in Anatoly Rybakov's *Heavy Sand*', *Modern Language Association*, 111.2 (1996), 240–55 (p. 240).

one hand, deprives them, to take up Olga Gershenson's idea, of the immense tragedy they suffered as a result of the Germans' anti-Semitic policies¹¹ and, on the other, denies them recognition as a national group fighting in regular and partisan units. Similarly puzzling is the fact that, when casting Jewish protagonists, Makine adopts the assimilationist position. This means that, as I will demonstrate in the present chapter, he systematically de-Judaizes the Jews by downplaying the importance of their cultural, religious and linguistic difference. Such narrative choices seem all the more intriguing considering the author's apparent ambitions to rectify Soviet historiography by giving voice to the Great Fatherland War's unmourned victims and uncelebrated heroes, among whom the Jews can no doubt be counted.

A cursory glance at Makine's novels may give the impression that their author is intent on restoring Jewish fighters and Holocaust victims to their rightful place in the history of the Great Fatherland War. He does so by addressing, however obliquely, the Jewish genocide while undermining the centuries-old Russian stereotypes of Jews, including those concerning the Jewish soldiers' unwillingness to fight. To test Makine's commitment to honouring Jewish heroes and victims, and, more broadly, to the revisionist approach to history associated with postmodern literature, in the present chapter I will re-examine *Confession* and *Requiem*, and examine *La Musique*, which are the author's three novels that are both set on Soviet soil and have Jewish themes.¹² To achieve this objective, the chapter's first part will place Makine's writing in the context of the Soviet authorities' discriminatory policy regarding the Jewish both catastrophe and participation in the war, which is often attributed to Russian (and then Soviet) anti-Semitism. I then broaden the theoretical focus of my discussion by placing Makine's writing at the intersection between the Holocaust, which is frequently considered as a watershed between modernity and postmodernity, and postmodern philosophy and aesthetics, which are indeed believed to have arisen as a consequence of, *inter alia*, modernity's implication in the Final Solution. Given the postmodern aura of Makine's writing, the author's interest in the Soviet Jews' wartime ordeal is further legitimated by the association between the Shoah and the loss of faith in the grand narratives of the Enlightenment. Also, as instantiated by texts such as Jean-Paul Sartre's 1946 essay *Réflexions sur la question juive* or Lyotard's 1988 treatise *Heidegger*

11 Gershenson states that as a result of Soviet policies, Soviet Jews were 'Jews without the Holocaust'. Gershenson, p. 2.

12 Another of Makine's works featuring a Jewish protagonist is *Le Pays du Lieutenant Schreiber*. Yet, the novel falls outside the scope of my discussion as its action takes place in France and its protagonist is an Alsatian Jew.

et 'les juifs', the Jews — or rather 'the jews' — have been the locus of positively valorised alterity in post-war French thought, even though some see such *sémitophilie* as stamped with Western Judeophobia. Supporting my discussion of Makine's three novels with theoretical texts in which 'Auschwitz' has been shorthand for the elusiveness of memory and a reminder that facts are but signs that can be questioned or even negated, in what follows I query the genuineness of Makine's ambition to re-inscribe the Jewish catastrophe and frontline heroics into the history of the Great Fatherland War, before drawing some conclusions regarding the novelist's contribution to the memory of the wartime experience of Soviet Jews.

My analysis of Makine's portrayal of Jews — Yakov Zinger (*Confession*), Marelst (*Requiem*) and Alexei Berg (*La Musique*) — is structured into three parts: beginning with the author's treatment of the Holocaust, I demonstrate that the latter occupies astonishingly little space in novels which, taking place during World War II, are set chiefly on the territories that saw the horrific effects of the Final Solution. Indeed, while Babi Yar and other places of Jewish martyrdom on Soviet soil are entirely absent from Makine's prose, concentration camps are invoked only indirectly (*Requiem*) or in passing (*Confession*). Similarly, the writer's way of handling the blow which the Shoah dealt to Soviet Jewry and which must have sent ripples through Soviet postwar society is highly ambiguous, not to say unflattering for these concerned. Including only one Holocaust survivor in his entire oeuvre, Makine confronts the subject through the figure of a so-called 'privileged Jew', a choice that places the victims of the Germans' anti-Semitic violence in the uncomfortable position of their oppressors' accomplices. Moving on to Makine's portrayal of Jewish soldiers, in the chapter's second part I show that, even if through the characters of Marelst and Berg the author strives to dispel the centuries-old stereotype of the Jewish army-dodger, the heroism of the Jewish fighters staged by his novels consists largely in their renunciation of their ethnicity, tradition, religion, language and culture. Having given up their identity, Makine's Jews embrace a pan-Soviet identity which the author eulogises and equates with Russianness. What this means in practice is that the three Jewish protagonists become self-effacing, anti-individualistic, anti-materialistic, ascetic, patient, enduring and resigned to their *fate*,¹³ just as are the indigenous Russians populating Makine's

13 I use the term 'fate' here in the sense of the Russian term '*sud'ba*'. For linguist Anna Wierzbicka, this term does not correspond to its usual English (destiny, fate), French (*destin*) or German (*Schicksal*) translation, but expresses the Russians' non-agentivity, that is fatalism, resignation, submissiveness, conviction that human beings are not in control of their lives, and lack of emphasis on the individual as an autonomous agent.

oeuvre. As for the prickly question of Soviet anti-Semitism, be it popular or state-encouraged, the author's work grossly underrepresents it, which it does by glossing over it, trivialising it or showing it as something that can be easily overcome by his thoughtful, tolerant and high-minded Gentile protagonists. What is, however, even more disturbing in Makine's figuration of the Jews — be their valiant fighters or helpless victims of Nazi brutality — is, as I contend in the chapter's closing two sections, their systematic transmogrification into the Russians' humble servants, which is communicated with recurrent intertextual references to the Saint Christopher legend. By casting the Jew as a malevolent, Devil-serving ogre who, having carried Christ across a dangerous river, became a fervent Christian, Makine paints Jewishness in highly uncomplimentary terms. In the Franco-Russian writer's prose being Jewish is, I will posit, a fault that in itself generates a sense of guilt and must be repented through self-sacrifice that almost invariably equals self-annihilation. Consequently, my contention in this chapter will be that, to be able to enter Makine's novelistic universe, Jews must give up their difference and adopt Soviet — or rather, Russian — values whose superiority they recognise by assuming a subservient position towards their Russian masters. This suggests that the author follows the official Soviet line that Jews must prove their allegiance to Soviet ideals much more than they deserve a memorial of their specifically Jewish tragedy or recognition of their contribution to defeating Hitler. Thus, I will postulate that Makine's representation of a minority written out of the history of the Great Fatherland War produces concealment rather than the promised revelation, and deliberate forgetting rather than commemoration.

The Holocaust as a Non-Event and Russian/Soviet Anti-Semitism

Although, as already indicated, much of the Holocaust unravelled on Soviet soil and Jewish fighters constituted an important force in both the Red Army and partisan units, already during the war Jews found themselves among the conflict's marginalised participants. Just as Jewish combatants would not be recognised as a separate national group and their individual achievements would be undervalued, Soviet authorities and, consequently, historians and writers persistently refused to separate the Jewish genocide from the calamities the Germans wrought upon the USSR between 1941 and 1944. This discriminatory policy, which continued throughout the postwar period, has been explained in

Anna Wierzbicka, *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition: Universal Human Concepts in Culture-Specific Configurations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 395.

numerous ways, yet it is the Russian/Soviet state's anti-Jewish prejudice that has been most frequently identified as the root of the methodical downplaying of the Jews' sufferings at the hands of the Nazis and participation in the war effort. I feel that in order to fully understand Makine's novelistic representation of Jews, the Russian and especially the Soviet state's policy towards this ethnic minority has to be outlined, with particular attention being paid to the authorities' attitude towards the legacy of the Holocaust and the memory of Jewish fighters.

The Jewish question truly appeared in Russia only in the second half of the eighteenth century, that is after the country became home to a considerable Jewish population through the annexation of large chunks of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Between 1791 and 1917 the Jews were confined to the Pale of Settlement,¹⁴ which has been described as 'the single most destructive legal burden borne by Russian Jewry',¹⁵ and were subject to many restrictions,¹⁶ not to mention the fact that they were victims of pogroms, as are called outbursts of anti-Semitic violence that were 'planned, welcomed or at least tolerated by the government'.¹⁷ The Jewish situation somewhat improved after the October Revolution as the Bolsheviks gave the Jews equal rights and emphatically condemned anti-Semitism.¹⁸ Notwithstanding these positive changes, for Lenin — just as for Marx earlier — the Jews were not a nation

14 In today's terms, the territory of the Pale of Settlement, created by Catherine II, corresponds to Lithuania, Ukraine, Latvia, Moldova and parts of Poland.

15 John D. Klier, 'Russian Jewry on the Eve of the Pogroms', in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. by John Doyle Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 3–12 (p. 5).

16 Zvi Gitelman, 'Glasnost, Perestroika and Antisemitism', *Foreign Affairs* <<https://www.foreignaffairs.org/articles/russia-fsu/1991-03-01/glasnost-perestroika-and-antisemitism>>. Jews had limited access to education and were banned from owning land. Elsewhere Gitelman states that Jewish teenagers were drafted into the Russian army for twenty-five years, which meant that some fifty percent of them were lost to their cultural communities. Zvi Gitelman, 'The Soviet Union', in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, ed. by David S. Wyman and Charles H. Rosenzweig (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 295–324 (p. 295).

17 John D. Klier, 'The Pogrom Paradigm in Russian History', in *Pogroms*, ed. by Klier and Lambroza, pp. 13–38 (p. 13). Klier distinguishes three major waves of anti-Jewish rioting: 1881–1882, 1903–1906 and 1919–1921.

18 In 1918 pogroms were outlawed while all the former restrictions upon the rights of Jews were repealed. Having said that, from 1922 onwards there was no law prohibiting anti-Semitism. Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews*, p. 83. See also Korey, *The Soviet Cage*, p. 22.

but merely a sect, Yiddish a jargon, and Zionism a reactionary bourgeois movement.¹⁹ This meant that the Bolsheviks' position was that Jews must assimilate and vanish.²⁰ Such a stance on the Jewish question was shared by Stalin who considered the Jews as 'unsolid' or 'floating' people, and whose administration saw the rebirth of anti-Semitism, as both popular hatred of the Jews and discriminatory state policy.²¹ Indeed, having been temporarily muted in the wake of the October Revolution, anti-Jewish sentiments were revived once Stalin moved away from the Bolsheviks' internationalism towards Russian nationalism and its irrevocable component, anti-Semitism. Alfred Skerpan's observation that 'the passions and prejudices of the prerevolutionary period pale in comparison with what Soviet regime ushered in',²² is evidenced by the late 1930s purges, which, as many claim and as Makine's novels repeatedly imply, were aimed expressly at the Jews.²³

However difficult this may be to fathom in the context of the Nazis' anti-Jewish measures, anti-Semitism persisted throughout World War II as nationalism and, by proxy, xenophobia were being fostered in order to boost the war effort.²⁴ The situation of Soviet Jewry further deteriorated when the onset of the Cold War brought both the worsening of the USSR's relations with the West and an additional upsurge of chauvinism. These tendencies translated into what William Korey calls 'morbid suspicions of imperialist plots emanating from the West',²⁵ with the Jews being identified as 'plotters' or 'rootless

19 Korey, *The Soviet Cage*, p. 12.

20 Richard Pipes, 'Foreword', in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, ed. by Dobroszycki and Gurock, pp. VII–VIII (p. VII).

21 Alfred A. Skerpan, 'Aspects of Soviet Anti-Semitism', *The Antioch Review*, 12.3 (Autumn 1952), 287–328 (p. 288).

22 *Idem*. Skerpan refers to Solomon Schwarz, *The Jews in the Soviet Union* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1951).

23 Korey, *The Soviet Cage*, p. 67; Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews*, p. 84.

24 William Korey, 'The Origins and Development of Soviet Anti-Semitism: An Analysis', *Slavic Review*, 31.1 (March 1972), 111–35 (p. 122). See also Korey, *The Soviet Cage*, p. 67. Gitelman states that in 1943 secret directives were issued 'to treat Jews with suspicion and deny them access to positions of great responsibilities.' He exemplifies these anti-Jewish measures with the story of the daily *Krasnaya Zvezda* (*Red Star*) whose editorial board was purged of Jews. Zvi Gitelman, 'Internationalism, Patriotism, and Disillusion: Soviet Jewish Veterans Remember World II and the Holocaust', *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Symposium Presentations* (Washington: Centre for Advances Holocaust Studies, 2005), pp. 95–126 (p. 97).

25 Korey, 'The Origins and Development of Soviet Anti-Semitism', p. 124.

cosmopolitans'.²⁶ The anti-cosmopolitan campaign,²⁷ which entailed the state-organised murder of Chairman of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAFK) Solomon Mikhoels,²⁸ the dissolution of JAFK itself, the closure of other Jewish cultural institutions and mass arrests among the participants of Yiddish culture,²⁹ culminated in the Doctors' Plot. In 1953 nine Jewish physicians were accused of having assassinated two members of the Soviet political elite and of preparing to kill further prominent officials. It is generally believed that the planned show trials and public executions of the 'murderers in white aprons' were to provoke a massive wave of pogroms that would in turn legitimate the exile of Jews to Siberia.³⁰ Although Stalin's alleged plans were forestalled by the dictator's death, state-sponsored Judeophobia persisted, as illustrated by the systematic discrimination of Jewish culture, the quota system in universities,³¹ the show trials of Jews,³² or the vitriolic language of the anti-Zionist campaign launched after the 1967 Six-Day War, where Israel was repeatedly compared to Nazi Germany.³³

Given the present book's concern with Makine's representation of World War II, the most pertinent manifestation of the Soviet state's unfair attitude towards Jews is the official (mis)representation of Jewish martyrdom and heroism during the Great Fatherland War. Just as Soviet school manuals, history books or encyclopaedias contained virtually no reference to the presence of

26 Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews*, pp. 152–55. See also Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 82.

27 Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union*, p. 169.

28 JAFK was established in April 1942 and was designed to win Jewish sympathy in the Western world and to obtain material aid for the Soviet cause. Korey, *The Soviet Cage*, p. 68.

29 *Ibidem*, p. 34.

30 David Brandenberger, 'Stalin's Last Crime? Recent Scholarship on Postwar Soviet Antisemitism and the Doctors' Plot', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 6.1 (Winter 2005), 187–204 (p. 194). See also Gennadi Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadow: Anti-Semitism in Stalin's Russia* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1995). For details of Stalin's plan for the exile of Jews to Siberia, see Iakov Ettinger, 'The Doctors' Plot: Stalin's Solution to the Jewish Question', in *Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. by Yaacov Ro'i (London: Frank Cass, 1995), pp. 103–26. The Doctors' Plot incited a wave of popular anti-Semitism, making the Russians shy away from Jewish physicians and attack Jews verbally and physically. Gitelman, 'Glasnost, Perestroika and Antisemitism'.

31 Korey, 'The Origins and Development of Soviet Anti-Semitism', p. 127.

32 As an example one can quote the trial of Eduard Kuznetsov and Mark Dymshits who unsuccessfully tried to hijack a civilian plane to escape to the West and who only avoided the death penalty thanks to incredible international pressure. *Ibidem*, pp. 7–13.

33 Korey, *The Soviet Cage*, pp. 125–41.

Jews on Russian/Soviet territory, or indeed to the role of Jews in world history,³⁴ the Holocaust was, as Lukasz Hirszowicz puts it, a non-event in Soviet Russia.³⁵ More precisely, it was either ignored, submerged in more general accounts of the period or subject to universalising approaches.³⁶ In other words, the Holocaust was never presented as a unique, separate phenomenon; rather, it was posited by Soviet authorities as a consequence of racist fascism, which in turn was the ultimate expression of capitalism.³⁷ So much so that until the late 1980s the word 'Holocaust' was practically unknown in the USSR where — if at all — 'annihilation' or 'catastrophe' were used instead.³⁸ This deliberate and systematic policy of obliteration is exemplified by the authorities' reaction to Ilya Ehrenburg's and Vassily Grossman's 1946 *Black Book* that was confined to storage warehouses along with the type from which the copies had been set. Compiled by two reporters for the Red Army, the book contained details of the Germans' mass murder of Jews on Soviet and Polish territories.³⁹ A similarly hostile reaction was provoked by Anatoly Kuznetsov's novel *Babi Yar*, published only after having been submitted to stringent censorship, or to Evgeny Evtushenko's poem of the same title that implicitly indicted the suppression of information about the identity of the victims of the 1941 massacre.⁴⁰ While

34 *Ibidem*, pp. 83–96. In his very detailed survey of Soviet school manuals, Korey notes the absence of a reference to Karl Marx's Jewish origins or to the fact that the Nazis hated Heinrich Heine because of his Jewishness. The history of France passes over the Dreyfus affair in silence and there is no mention of the 1948 creation of the state of Israel. If the latter is discussed at all, it is as an 'aggressor' in the 1956 war. Likewise, Jews are invisible in Russian history.

35 Hirszowicz, p. 29.

36 Zvi Gitelman, 'Soviet Reactions to the Holocaust 1945–1991', in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, ed. by Dobroszycki and Gurock, pp. 3–24 (p. 3).

37 *Ibidem*, p. 7.

38 Gitelman, 'Internationalism, Patriotism, and Disillusion', p. 102.

39 Gitelman, 'Soviet Reactions to the Holocaust 1945–1991', p. 8.

40 As soon as the war was over, the authorities began to cover up the true identity of the Babi Yar victims and, after Stalin's death, when monuments to the war dead were mushrooming all over the USSR, they decided to raze the area and to erect on the site a sports stadium and a dam. When a monument was finally constructed in 1976, it was placed almost a mile from the actual site and in no way suggested the Jewish identity of the overwhelming majority of the victims. Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, pp. 121–22. See also William Korey, 'A Monument Over Babi Yar?', in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, ed. by Dobroszycki and Gurock, pp. 61–76; and Kiril Feferman, *Soviet Jewish Stepchild: The Holocaust in the Soviet Mindset, 1941–1964* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2009), pp. 19–60. The first film about Babi Yar was shown only in 1987. It was Vitaly Korotich's *Babi Yar: Lessons in History*, which had in fact been made in 1981 but was stopped from

Evtushenko himself was accused of nationalism and of failing to pay homage to the Russian triumph over fascism, his poem was denounced for, in Tumarkin's words, 'represent[ing] things as if only Jews were victims of the fascist atrocities' and of 'depriv[ing] the larger Soviet polity of its status as supervictim'.⁴¹ Finally, it is for the same reason that Grossman did not manage to have his *Life and Fate* published before his death, as the novel confronts, among other uncomfortable subjects, Russian anti-Semitism and the Nazis' persecution of Jews. According to Zvi Gitelman, such a stance on the Holocaust legacy was motivated by the authorities' fear of reinforcing the Jews' collective identity since the memory of the terrible tragedy would have been likely to 'stir a throbbing national consciousness. Martyrdom, after all, is a powerful stimulus to a group's sense of its own identity'.⁴² Other scholars believe that the regime was simply afraid of 'shortchang[ing] the Russian war effort',⁴³ anti-Semitism being the corollary to Great Russian nationalism.⁴⁴ Additionally, Ilya Altman notes that to acknowledge the Jewish catastrophe would have meant to accept Soviet responsibility for failing to save the Jews,⁴⁵ and, as Gitelman speculates, would have raised the sensitive issue of collaboration among Ukrainians and Baltic nationalities. In short, the Great Fatherland War was too valuable an asset in Soviet politics to 'give it to the Jews'.⁴⁶ Needless to say, a similar blanket of silence was laid over the identity of Jewish partisans and Red Army soldiers,⁴⁷ the suppression of references to Jewish heroism being corroborated

being screened by censorship for the following six years. And this was despite the fact that the film presented the Nazi violence as directed towards Soviet citizens and not Jews specifically and, universalising it, compared it to the crimes of the Ku Klux Klan, Israeli Zionism or America's invasion of Vietnam. See Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, pp. 185–86.

- 41 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 121. Korey multiplies examples of writers who were charged with 'nationalistic slander' and 'defamation of the Soviet nation' for speaking about the identity of the Babi Yar victims. Korey, 'A Monument Over Babi Yar?', pp. 64–5.
- 42 Gitelman, 'Soviet Reactions to the Holocaust 1945–1991', p. 6.
- 43 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 121.
- 44 William Korey, 'In History's "Memory-Hole": The Soviet Treatment of the Holocaust', in *Contemporary Views on the Holocaust*, ed. by L. Braham (Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing, 1983), pp. 145–82 (p. 146). See also Korey, 'The Origins and Development of Soviet Anti-Semitism', p. 122.
- 45 Quoted by Gershenson, p. 3.
- 46 For a detailed discussion of the Soviet state's possible reasons for downplaying or ignoring the Holocaust, see Gitelman, 'Internationalism, Patriotism, and Disillusion', p. 104.
- 47 Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner*, p. 4. It is difficult to offer the precise number of Jewish soldiers as records are incomplete, while the Jews themselves frequently disguised their identity when drafted in.

by a survey of Soviet history books which, while mentioning other nationalities' participation in the armed struggle against Hitler, persistently avoided identifying Jewish fighters.⁴⁸

The Jew as the Postmodern Other

If the afore-described marginalisation or even victimisation of Soviet Jews is enough to turn Jewish women and men into suitable candidates for Makinean protagonists, the presence of Jews in the Franco-Russian author's prose is further vindicated by the fact that in postwar thought, and especially in France, Judaism has been, as Sarah Hammerschlag states, an emblem of victimhood and outsiderdom.⁴⁹ Moreover, the Holocaust itself has been seen as a transformational event in Western history and thought, marking the threshold between modernism and postmodernism.⁵⁰ Accordingly, Nazism is regarded as an attempt at the realisation of the utopian dream to instate the supremacy

48 Gitelman cites the case of the seventeen-year old partisan, Masha Bruskina, hung by the Nazis in Minsk. Despite the testimonies giving her name and ethnicity, in the Minsk Museum of the History of the Great Fatherland War Bruskina is still referred to as an 'unknown partisan'. Gitelman, 'The Soviet Union', p. 309. Elsewhere Gitelman cites the story of Efim Moiseyevich, the only defender of the Brest-Litovsk fortress whose identity is omitted by S. S. Smirnov's three-volume book on World War II, although all the other defenders' nationalities are clearly stated. Gitelman, 'Soviet Reactions to the Holocaust 1945–1991', p. 12. Korey quotes Ehrenburg who remembered that in 1943 Aleksander Shcherbakov, the head of the Army's Political Commissariat and a close associate of Stalin, instructed him to play down the exploits of Jews in the Red Army. Korey, *The Soviet Cage*, p. 67.

49 Sarah Hammerschlag, *The Figural Jew: Politics and Identity in Postwar French Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 3–5. Hammerschlag traces this tendency back to May '68 when students carried banners saying 'Nous sommes tous des juifs allemands' ['We are all German Jews'] in support of Daniel Cohn-Bendit. Having become an unwilling symbol of the movement, Cohn-Bendit was threatened with the ban of re-entering France. That the Jews have grown to symbolise the Other also transpires from Edward Saïd's statement that he was the last one of the Jews, which, by the way, Alain Finkielkraut has called the usurpation of the position of the Jew.

50 Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, 'Postmodernism and the Holocaust', in *Postmodernism and the Holocaust*, ed. by Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 1–22 (p. 2). Likewise, Robert Eaglestone contends that in the West postmodernism begins with thinking about the Holocaust and is a response to it. Finally, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe calls the Holocaust a 'caesura in global history'. Robert Eaglestone, *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 2; and Philippe

of white and industrious Europeans, a dream that was indeed underlying the modern *grands récits*.⁵¹ While in *Heidegger et 'les juifs'* Lyotard will say that modernism has silenced itself and has nothing more to say,⁵² the precursors of French postmodern philosophy, such as Emanuel Levinas, Maurice Blanchot or Georges Bataille, have all been inspired by the Jewish genocide to rethink the implications of the project of modernity and to see political violence as inseparable from the ontological totalitarianism of Western philosophy.⁵³ Elizabeth Bellamy thus conceives of the Holocaust as the major unresolved trauma that not only constitutes the core of Western identity but also 'haunts the divide between modernism and postmodernism'.⁵⁴ Bellamy's study yields the observation that French postwar thought has been seeking to constitute itself as a philosophy 'after Auschwitz'⁵⁵ and that, after Auschwitz, Jews were transformed into 'signifiers for the decentered, destabilised subject in a theoretical system that persists in defining [...] them from without'.⁵⁶ This means that one can talk about 'a new post-Holocaust *sémitophilie*' that fetishises the Jew⁵⁷ and 'privileges the very figure of diaspora [...] [that] anti-Semitism has traditionally scorned'.⁵⁸ Yet, as both Bellamy and Hammerschlag note, thinkers such

Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art and Politics: The Fiction of the Political*, trans. by Chris Turner (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 45.

- 51 The rootedness of Nazism in the soil of modernity has been discussed by scholars such as Claudia Koonz, Robert Gellately or Detlev J. K. Peukert, who insists that Nazism is an expression of the 'pathologies and dislocations of modernity'. Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 243. Quoted by Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, 'Michel Foucault, Auschwitz and the Destruction of the Body', in *Postmodernism and the Holocaust*, ed. by Milchman and Rosenberg pp. 205–86 (p. 207). For the link between modernity and the Holocaust, see Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, 'The Unlearned Lessons of the Holocaust', *Modern Judaism*, 13.2 (May 1993), 177–90.
- 52 Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger et 'les juifs'* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), p. 90.
- 53 Milchman and Rosenberg, 'Postmodernism and the Holocaust', p. 2. See also Milchman and Rosenberg, 'The Unlearned Lessons of the Holocaust', pp. 179–80. This position is shared by thinkers such as Jean-Luc Nancy, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jacques Derrida or Zygmunt Bauman. The latter who argues that modernity itself, with its principles of rationality and efficiency, was among the factors that made the Final Solution possible. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).
- 54 Elizabeth J. Bellamy, *Affective Genealogies: Psychoanalysis, Postmodernism and the Jewish Question' after Auschwitz* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 4.
- 55 *Ibidem*, p. 114.
- 56 *Ibidem*, p. 31.
- 57 *Ibidem*, p. 17.
- 58 *Idem*.

as Maurice Blanchot, Julia Kristeva or Slavoj Žižek, who are associated with philo-Semitism, have been accused of reviving earlier and somewhat stereotypical portrayals of Judaism. Among these portrayals is Sartre's aforementioned essay,⁵⁹ where the Jew appears as a stranger and intruder, conjuring up the notions of *alterité*, *déracinement* and *étrangeté*.⁶⁰ Consequently, despite these thinkers' programmatic scepticism of the tendency of Western thought to generalise and deride, they have been reproached with re-inscribing the ideological anti-Semitic bias,⁶¹ and of reducing the Jew to a dehistoricised and essentialised trope for the Other.⁶²

A similar controversy has been aroused by Lyotard's preoccupation with the Jews and the Holocaust. The French philosopher's detractors criticise him for having founded his portrait of 'the jews' on the history of representation,⁶³ and accuse him of philo-Semitism with 'questionable ideological baggage and political consequences'.⁶⁴ Lyotard's advocates, on the other hand, highlight his critical distance towards the negative connotations encapsulated in the term 'the jews', which, consistently spelt with the lower case, used in the plural and presented in quotation marks, refers to the ideas associated with the real Jews in the West. Yet, as opposed to the actual Jews, 'the jews' are not a nation, ethnicity or religion, but a figure to describe 'ce non-peuple de survivants, juifs et non-juifs [...] dont l'être-ensemble ne tient à l'authenticité d'aucune racine première, mais à cette seule dette d'une anamnèse interminable.' ['this non-people of survivors, Jews and non-Jews [...] whose being together does not depend on the authenticity of any primary roots but on that singular debt of an interminable anamnesis.']⁶⁵ Using 'Auschwitz' to symbolise postmodern mnemonics,⁶⁶ Lyotard's 1988 essay is an example of the pivotal role of the memory of the unrepresentable, as the Jewish genocide has been constituted in postwar and

59 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954).

60 Bellamy, p. 17.

61 Michael Weingrad, 'Jews (in Theory): Representation of Judaism, Anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust in Postmodern French Thought', *Judaism*, 45.1 (Winter 1996), 19–98 (p. 79).

62 Sarah Hammerschlag, 'Troping the Jew: Jean-François Lyotard's *Heidegger* and "the jews"', *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 12.4 (2005), 371–98 (p. 371).

63 *Ibidem*, p. 375. Among Lyotard's critics are Michael Weingrad and Debra Bergoffen. See Michael Weingrad; and Debra Bergoffen, 'Interrupting Lyotard, Wither the We?', in *Lyotard: Philosophy, Politics and the Sublime*, ed. by Hugh Silverman (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 127–39.

64 Weingrad, p. 82.

65 Lyotard, *Heidegger et 'les juifs'*, p. 152. This and all the following translations of quotations from *Heidegger et 'les juifs'* come from *Heidegger and 'the jews'*, trans. by Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

66 J. Bellamy, p. 140.

postmodern thought by, among other thinkers, Blanchot.⁶⁷ To counter the vast Nazi effort to impose forgetting, which was to be realised through the annihilation of the European Jewry and the subsequent destruction of all evidence thereof, the Holocaust must be committed to memory, since to forget it would be, as Judeo-German philosopher Emil Fackenheim contends, to grant Hitler yet another victory.⁶⁸ Similarly, for Alain Finkielkraut, in a post-Holocaust era memory is in crisis and Jewish memory itself is threatened.⁶⁹

The question of keeping the memory of 'Auschwitz' alive also permeates the work of postmodern philosophers, including Foucault⁷⁰ and Derrida,⁷¹ although it is unquestionably Lyotard who has most explicitly articulated the connection between the Holocaust and memory in the face of postmodern relativity resulting from the suspicion towards modernity's metanarratives. While 'Auschwitz' is already an important subtext of *La Condition postmoderne*, which implicitly likens the hegemony of the *grands récits* to the Nazi ideology and its programmatic anti-Semitism, *Le Différend*, written in response to Robert Faurisson's negationism,⁷² is driven by the contention that modernity's totalising narratives write out of history and therefore silence the Other. Using the existence of gas chambers as an example of the differend, which, as opposed to litigation, is a conflict between parties who cannot agree on a rule by which their dispute might be resolved,⁷³ the philosopher himself questions the possibility of assigning to 'Auschwitz' a univocal meaning in the face of the absence of an absolute code of knowledge,⁷⁴ an absolute judge⁷⁵ or an absolute criterion for validity. Having discredited the knowledge-legitimizing narratives, we

67 Maurice Blanchot, *L'Écriture du désastre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980).

68 Emil Fackenheim, *The Jewish Return into History: Reflexions in the Age of Auschwitz and a New Jerusalem* (New York: Schocken, 1978), pp. 19–24. Quoted by Bellamy, p. 4.

69 *Ibidem*, p. 17.

70 See Milchman and Rosenberg, 'Michel Foucault, Auschwitz and the Destruction of the Body'.

71 In an interview Derrida said: 'Certainly "Auschwitz" [...] has never been "far away from my thoughts"'. Quoted in *Postmodernism and the Holocaust*, ed. by Milchman and Rosenberg, pp. 2–3. To Derrida's preoccupation with the Holocaust also testifies his reading of Paul Celan's poetry. Jacques Derrida, 'Poetics and Politics of Witnessing', *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. by Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 65–96.

72 For more on Faurisson's denial of the Holocaust, see Stephen E. Atkins, *Holocaust Denial as an International Movement* (Westport: Prager Publishers, 2009), pp. 92–4.

73 Jean-François Lyotard, *Le Différend* (Paris: Minuit, 1983), pp. 24–5.

74 Before agreeing on the existence of gas chambers, the plaintiff and the adversary must agree on the meaning of the expression 'gas chambers'. *Ibidem*, p. 34.

75 *Ibidem*, p. 90.

have allowed the Nazis — as fleshed out by Claude Lanzmann's 1985 monumental documentary *Shoah* — to deny or dispute the meaning of 'Auschwitz' and have deprived Jewish witnesses of the means or the right to prove their damage [*le dommage*], thus confining them to the position of victims in a *différend*.⁷⁶ To those who, like Faurisson, deny the reality of the Holocaust for absence of eyewitnesses of gas chambers and documents proving the exact scale of the Nazi crime, Lyotard responds as follows:

avec Auschwitz, quelque chose de nouveau a eu lieu dans l'histoire, qui ne peut être qu'un signe et non un fait, c'est que les faits, les témoignages qui portaient la trace des *ici* et des *maintenant*, les documents qui indiquaient le sens ou les sens des faits, et les noms, enfin la possibilité des diverses sortes de phrases dont la conjonction fait la réalité, tout cela a été détruit autant que possible. Appartient-il à l'historien de prendre en compte non le dommage seulement, mais le tort? Non la réalité, mais la méta-réalité qu'est la destruction de la réalité? Non le témoignage, mais ce qui reste du témoignage quand il est détruit [...], le sentiment? Non le litige, mais le *différend*? Évidemment oui, s'il est vrai qu'il n'y aurait pas d'histoire sans *différend*, que le *différend* naît d'un tort et se signale par un silence, que le silence indique que des phrases sont en souffrance de leur événement, que le sentiment est cette souffrance. Mais il faut alors que l'historien rompe avec le monopole consenti au régime cognitif des phrases sur l'histoire, et s'aventure à prêter l'oreille à ce qui n'est pas présentable dans les règles de la connaissance.

[with Auschwitz, something new has happened in history (which can only be a sign and not a fact), which is that the facts, the testimonies which bore the traces of these *heres* and *nows*, the documents which indicated the sense or senses of the facts, and the names, finally the possibility of various kinds of phrases whose conjunction makes reality, all this has been destroyed as much as possible. Is it up to the historian to take into account not only the damages, but also the wrong? Not only the reality but also the meta-reality that is the destruction of reality? Not only the testimony, but also what is left of the testimony when it is destroyed

76 *Ibidem*, p. 18. In their reading of *Le Différend*, Milchman and Rosenberg contend that the stifling of the victim's voice and the failure to recognise the injustice inflicted upon the victim and to understand the victim's language, are the preconditions of a genocide such as the Holocaust. Milchman and Rosenberg, 'The Unlearned Lessons of the Holocaust', pp. 196–87.

[...], the feeling? Not only the litigation, but also the differend? Yes, of course, it is true that there would be no history without a differend, that a differend is born from a wrong and is signalled by a silence, that the silence indicates that phrases are in abeyance of their becoming event, that the feeling is the suffering of this abeyance. But then, the historian must break with the monopoly over history granted to the cognitive regimen of phrases, and he or she must venture forth by lending his or her ear to what is not presentable under the rules of knowledge.]⁷⁷

In a later essay Lyotard returns to Jewish memory, this time, as we read in the foreword to the English translation of *Heidegger et 'les juifs'*, attacking a thinking that forgets and a thinking that ignores what is forgotten, while positing itself as a memorialising project that takes on the task of recovering the forgotten and, in this way, forgetting it.⁷⁸ Raised to the status of a symbol of political marginality charged with the associations that developed as a consequence of anti-Semitism, but also with those positive ones created by the work of Sartre, Levinas, Derrida and Blanchot,⁷⁹ in Lyotard's essay 'the jews' trace, according to Bellamy, 'the lineaments of postmodern memory'⁸⁰ or, in other words, become a central figure for the failure of memory and for the thinking and writing about the forgotten. Consequently, philosophy and writing have a responsibility towards the forgotten and the unrepresentable, and 'the jews' become the site of ethics and the embodiment of affect that, according to Lyotard, should replace Heideggerian ontology.⁸¹

It is in the light of both Soviet discriminatory policy on Jewish war memory and the afore-quoted theoretical remarks concerning the position of Jews and 'Auschwitz' in French postwar thought, that I will now investigate Makine's depiction of Soviet Jews' martyrdom and bravery. I am particularly interested in assessing how the Franco-Russian novelist's work responds to Lyotard's call for 'ethical' writing, that is whether and, if so, in what way his prose is 'thinking' of those deliberately written out of Soviet historiography. To put it differently,

77 Lyotard, *Le Différend*, p. 92. This and all the following translations of quotations from *Le Différend* come from *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. by Georges Van Den Abeele (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1988).

78 David Carroll, 'The Memory of Devastation and the Responsibilities of Thought: "and let's not talk about it"', in Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'the jews'*, trans. by Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. xv–xvii (p. xiii).

79 Hammerschlag, *The Figural Jew*, p. 9.

80 Bellamy, p. 141.

81 *Ibidem*, p. 140.

I will endeavour to establish whether in the process of re-inscribing the Jewish wartime experience into the history of the Great Fatherland War, Makine's novels produce commemoration or indeed only reproduce the forgetting imposed on Jews by Soviet authorities.

There Are Jews in Makine's Oeuvre but There Is No Jewish Question⁸²

It would be unfair to assert that Makine's novels totally ignore the existence of Jews in the Soviet Union or, more specifically, Jewish wartime experience. Yet, rather than speaking of it explicitly, they more often hint at their protagonist's identity with Jewish-sounding names or Jewish characteristics, just as did Soviet history books, encyclopaedias and works of literature.⁸³ And, as with Soviet writers, especially those of Gentile origin,⁸⁴ when describing his Jewish heroines and heroes Makine makes no reference to Jewish symbols, motifs, customs, specific qualities or national past. It is worth pointing out that this is in contrast to other ethnic or religious groups who, like the Jews, were singled out by Stalin's discriminatory policies, but who are nevertheless directly named by Makine's work. This is instantiated by presence of Old Believers in *Fleuve Amour*, of Balkars in *Requiem* or of Volga Germans in *Une femme aimée*.⁸⁵ In contrast to these minorities, apart from *Requiem* and *Le Pays du Lieutenant Schreiber*, whose Jewish protagonists are explicitly identified as such, the ethnicity of Makine's Jewish characters must be deduced from, for example, their names, as in the case of Sofia Abramovna, Yakov Zinger and his wife, Faya Moysseyevna. Another frequent clue is the protagonist's victimisation by the purges in the late 1930s and early 1940s that, as already mentioned, targeted mainly Jews.⁸⁶ This is illustrated by Sophia Abramovna's harrowing experience

82 Here I am paraphrasing the sentence often used to describe Soviet authorities position on the country's Jewish minority ('There are Jews in the Soviet Union, but there is no Jewish Question'). See, for example, Judith Kaplan-Weinger and Yonit Hoffman, 'Testimonies of Jewish Holocaust Survivors: Characterising the Narratives of Resistance and Resilience', in *The Holocaust: Memories and Histories*, ed. by Victoria Khiterer (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), pp. 105–74 (p. 151).

83 Hirszowicz, pp. 50–1.

84 Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews*, p. 390.

85 Among other minorities also present in Makine's work is the Georgian truck driver in *La Femme*, the Siberian machine gunner Lagun in *La Fille* or the Tatar in *Le Testament*.

86 Among the victims of the 1941 purge were chief commander of the Soviet Air Force Yakov Smushkevich and Colonel General Grigori Shtern, both bearers of the title of the Hero of the Soviet Union.

of the *gulag*, or by the stories of Yakov Zinger's uncle, Alexei Berg's parents, Marelst's father and Sergei Erdmann.⁸⁷ Moreover, endorsing the stereotypical view of Jews, Makine's Jewish protagonists are well-educated, cultured and musically-gifted urbanites. Alternatively, they are associated with typically Jewish professions and places, as evidenced by Marelst's father who, before moving to Moscow to become a minister, works as a clockmaker in Vitebsk,⁸⁸ the Belorussian town known as the birth place of Jewish painter Marc Chagall.

The story of Marelst's father is also one of the rare instances where Makine raises the issue of Russian anti-Semitism, even if the outburst of anti-Jewish violence he refers to takes place in pre- rather than postrevolutionary times. It is the news of what we guess to be the 1905 Kishinev pogrom that makes Marelst's father smash the most expensive clock in his shop and, as if he wanted to simultaneously signal his contempt for bourgeois values and stop the historical time, join the Revolution. Interestingly, rather than in the Russian state's xenophobic policies or in popular anti-Semitism, Marelst's father locates the source of the terrible acts perpetrated in Bessarabia, where the rioters drive nails into the skulls of newborn babies, in social inequality, whereby Makine echoes the official Soviet interpretation of the Nazis' anti-Semitism as a side effect of capitalism.⁸⁹ Originally well-intentioned, Marelst's father soon becomes corrupted by power, his moral downfall being signalled by his insensitivity to the plight of the *kulaks* being deported in cattle trucks, or of the victims of the 1934 state-organised Ukrainian famine, as well as by his marital infidelity. Significantly, this rare case of unethical behaviour found in an oeuvre populated almost uniquely with righteous people, reflects the negative stereotype of a Jew as 'a morally corrupt person'⁹⁰ who is 'devoid of all moral inhibitions and ready to perform any act of fraud in order to reap [...] material benefits'.⁹¹ The clockmaker-cum-apparatchik's story ends in his abrupt and — as we are meant to judge — fully deserved fall from grace, metaphorised by the way Marelst's father commits suicide: knowing his arrest to be imminent, he throws himself into the well of the staircase in his ministry.

87 It must be noted that Sergei Erdmann is not actually Jewish but assumes a Jewish identity to avoid persecution as a German on the outbreak of the war. Having fought as a Jew, he suffers from Stalin's anti-Jewish measures in the war's aftermath.

88 Cf. Mendel, the protagonist of a Primo Levi novel who is also a Judeo-Russian clockmaker and so is the father of the protagonist of John Boyne's 2006 novel *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas*. Primo Levi, *If Not Now, When?* (London: Penguin, 1995) and John Boyne, *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas* (London: Vintage, 2012).

89 Gitelman, 'Soviet Reactions to the Holocaust 1945–1991', p. 7.

90 Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews*, p. 87.

91 *Ibidem*, p. 91.

Apart from *Le Pays du Lieutenant Schreiber*, where anti-Semitism is overtly discussed (and condemned), and where, like in Makine's other novels, emphasis is placed on the Jew's praiseworthy acculturation, *Requiem* is the Franco-Russian writer's only other novel where the word 'Jew' is pronounced. There it is used, firstly, in relation to the character of Marelst that helps the author tackle both the sensitive issue of Soviet grassroots Judeophobia and the stereotype of Jews as unwilling to do military service. The novel's Jewish protagonist is also, as I have already argued and will continue to do so in this chapter, a medium for championing the cause of Soviet sacrifice and heroism in liberating Europe from the Nazi yoke, and the idea of the unity of all Soviet people in the struggle against fascism. The other occasion on which the word 'Jew' comes up in *Requiem* is in relation to Israel towards which, as already indicated, the Soviet Union nurtured a hostile attitude. This resentment towards the Jewish state is manifest in the scene set during the Cold War where, analysing a dogfight between two helicopters involved in the Yom Kippur War, a Russian weapons instructor evidently sides with the Arabs, whom the USSR trained, armed and supported:

Avec une perfidie inouïe, le soldat israélien ouvrit largement la porte latérale, pointa une mitrailleuse et cribla l'hélicoptère syrien qui s'abattit sous les yeux de l'inspecteur ... En racontant ce combat, l'officier disait tantôt 'juif' tantôt 'israélien', le second terme devenant dans sa bouche une sorte de superlatif du premier, *pour en indiquer le degré de malignité et de nuisance*.

[With unprecedented perfidy the Israeli soldier opened wide the side door, aimed a machine gun and riddled the Syrian helicopter, which crashed in front of the inspector's very eyes ... When describing the battle the instructor sometimes said 'Jewish', sometimes 'Israeli': in his mouth the latter term became a kind of superlative of the former, to indicate the degree of spite and malignancy.]

RE, 34–35, emphasis added

The Kholokaust and the Grey Zone⁹²

Considering the afore-discussed indirect treatment of Jews by Makine's prose, it is little surprising that a similar approach should be used when it comes

92 The term '*kholokaust*' began to be used in Soviet literature only in the late 1980s. *Ibidem*, p. 102.

to the Holocaust. Although mentioned by *Confession* and *Requiem*, the Jewish genocide is never explicitly named, except on one occasion when, in a scene set in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, *Requiem*'s protagonist-narrator and his former KGB mentor, Shakh, discuss the legacy of World War II. In response to the narrator's complaints about the Western intellectuals' belittlement of the Soviets' role in defeating fascism, Shakh sarcastically observes that in popular consciousness the war will soon be reduced to Hitler's anti-Semitism, to the regrettable detriment of crucial battles such as Kursk, Stalingrad or Moscow. While thus undermining the importance of the Jewish genocide, Shakh also derides Westerners who, allegedly incapable of grasping history in any detail, will have to devise a memory trick to retain the names of concentration camps. The exchange between the two men clearly implies that the 'fetishisation' of the Holocaust, which in any case belongs to the Western discourse on World War II, serves to diminish the value of the Soviet contribution to the victory over Hitler and that it is not only politically but also — if not mainly — economically grounded:

Habituer les gens à l'idée que ce sont toujours les Américains qui [...] ont sauv[é] [les Européens] et que les Russes ne savent même plus fabriquer de bonnes casseroles. Toute l'Europe de l'Est va être rééquipée avec des armes américaines. Des contrats des dizaines de milliards.

[Get people used to the idea that it is always the Americans who came to the rescue and that these days the Russians can't even make a decent saucepan. The whole of Eastern Europe is going to be re-equipped with American arms. Contracts worth tens of millions.]

RE, 232

Otherwise, although the majority of Makine's novels are set during World War II and the postwar period, and feature fighting that took place on the territories where the Jewish tragedy unravelled, these texts bear only scant traces of the Holocaust and even then represent it in a veiled fashion. In *Confession*, for example, the reader can only presume that Faya Moyssseyevna's parents perish in the Babi Yar massacre, as on the eve of the outbreak of the war they leave Leningrad for Kiev from where they never return. And, although Faya's war-time fortunes are meticulously recorded, both her Jewishness and the Jewish catastrophe that killed her parents and decimated her people are glossed over to the advantage of the ordeal of those trapped in besieged Leningrad.

The Holocaust is treated more openly through the story of Faya's husband who spent the war in concentration camps as member of a *Sonderkommando*, a Special Squad composed primarily of Jewish prisoners and in charge of the

crematoria. Yakov, who was only sixteen when rescued by the Soviets, is described as physically arrested at the moment of his capture by the Germans. By invoking a newborn child, some of Zinger's features — a large bald head, a toothless mouth — elicit a reading of the protagonist's miraculous survival as a rebirth, whereby his story would follow Makine's customary representation of the soldier's wartime experience. However, the description also supports the Foucauldian idea of the war's destructive effect upon the body discussed in previous chapters:

Ses yeux étaient profondément enfoncés dans des orbites béantes. Comme si quelqu'un, décidé à démolir cette tête, y avait plongé ses pouces, noyant ses yeux dans le cerveau. Son énorme crâne [...] semblait être composé de surfaces fragiles qui s'entrecoupaient presque géométriquement. Il n'avait plus de dents et souriait en serrant fort ses lèvres dans un étirement un peu douloureux.

[His eyes were deeply sunken in gaping sockets. As if somebody had taken his head, resolved to demolish it, and thrust his thumbs into the sockets, embedding the eyes in the brain. His vast cranium [...] seemed to be made up of fragile planes that intersected almost geometrically. He had no teeth and smiled with tightly clenched lips, stretching them in a rather painful grimace.]

CPDD, 17–18

Unlike this passage which reflects the Nazi regime's deliberate and systematic destructiveness only metaphorically, Yakov's testimony concerning the gas vans leaves no doubt as to the protagonist's wartime torment.⁹³ Yet, rather than being appalled by the horrors he witnessed, Zinger calmly relates them, focusing on the industrial side of the operation and the German guards' bureaucratic indifference. He thus implicitly endorses the well-known theory of the banality of evil;⁹⁴ according to Hannah Arendt, rather than heartless monsters, Adolf Eichmann and, by implication, other executioners of the *Endlösung*

93 The Germans introduced gas vans to spare the *Einsatzgruppen* the psychological effect of shooting women and children. Interestingly, gas vans had been invented in Soviet Russia in the 1930s during the purges. Alain Besançon, *A Century of Horrors: Communism, Nazism, and the Uniqueness of the Shoah*, trans. by Ralph C. Hancock and Nathaniel H. Hancock (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2007), p. 5.

94 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: The Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1992).

were nondescript bureaucrats propelled by specific historical circumstances to commit the atrocities they became responsible for and identified with.

Beside the fact that Makine's choice of a former concentration camp inmate is unrepresentative of Soviet Jews, who were murdered mostly in mass executions with only a few being sent to concentration and extermination camps,⁹⁵ a former *Sonderkommando* is an unlikely war survivor. This is because, even if during their miserable last weeks of life they may have been rewarded for their unwilling co-operation with food, clothing, bedding, cigarettes and alcohol — all naturally taken from the newly arrived transports —, members of these Special Squads were considered by the Germans as bearers of secrets (*Geheimnisträger*).⁹⁶ They were therefore routinely executed every few months and very few of them lived until the end of the war.⁹⁷ It seems therefore that Makine must have had strong reasons for staging such a character, one of which may have been to explain Yakov's survival, since there is a common — albeit erroneous in the case of the *Sonderkommandos* — perception that 'privileged' Jews⁹⁸ had a greater chance to survive than other Jews.⁹⁹

Another possibility is that Yakov's role in the camp is meant to place him inside what Primo Levi has famously called the 'grey zone' in the moral topography of the archipelago constituted by Nazi concentration camps, and identified as a space with 'ill-defined outlines which both separate and join the two camps of masters and servants.'¹⁰⁰ To describe the *Sonderkommando*'s work, its members used deception to maintain order among the prisoners to be gassed, sorted confiscated belongings and cut hair and extracted gold teeth from the bodies before burning the corpses and disposing of the ashes.¹⁰¹ In this sense, Yakov's engagement with a Special Squad, which for Levi is '[a]n

95 Gershenson, p. 6.

96 Adrian Meyrs, 'The Things of Auschwitz', *Archaeologies of Internment*, ed. by Adrian Meyrs and Gabriel Moshenska (New York: Springer, 2011), pp. 75–88 (p. 85).

97 During the existence of Birkenau, there were thirteen *Sonderkommandos* and their members were executed every four months. Adam Brown, *Judging 'Privileged' Jews: The Holocaust Ethics, Representation and the 'Grey Zone'* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), p. 2.

98 Among 'privileged' Jews were members of the *Judenräte* (Jewish councils) and of the *Ordnungsdienst* (Jewish police) in the ghettos, and *Kapos* (heads) of labour squads in the camps. *Ibidem*, p. 2.

99 Susan L. Pentlin, 'Holocaust Victims of Privilege', in *Problems Unique to the Holocaust*, ed. by Harry James Cargas (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), pp. 25–42 (p. 26).

100 Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. by Raymond Rosenthal (London: Michael Joseph, 1988), p. 27.

101 *Idem*.

extreme case of collaboration',¹⁰² makes him a doubly liminal figure: not only is he a Holocaust survivor with no place in Soviet wartime historiography, but also someone who found himself in the position of a participant in the genocide of which he was a victim. Makine's decision to cast a morally ambiguous character may have been motivated, firstly, by his need to foreground what, following Levi himself,¹⁰³ Debarati Sanyal characterises as the most chilling manifestation of the Nazi strategy to create an illusion of a mimetic relation between persecuted and persecutor,¹⁰⁴ that is to bind the victim to its executor by, in Levi's terms, 'the foul link of imposed complicity.'¹⁰⁵ To be fair to Makine, we could also speculate that the motive behind staging a Jew obliged to collude with the Germans was to avoid the glorification of the Holocaust victims. The author would therefore go against some literature about the *Endlösung*,¹⁰⁶ which denies those who perished at the hands of the Nazis, to quote Robert Lifton, 'the dignity of their limitations.'¹⁰⁷ Most likely, however, Makine wanted to portray Yakov, whose story, intriguingly, is not told individually as are those of Lyouba's sufferings in the Great Terror, Pyotr's wartime injury, or Faya's traumatic experience of the blockade, as less of a victim than are the other three characters. Pursuing this hypothesis, I believe that Makine aims to burden his Jewish character with guilt that his protagonist will then have to redeem, just as with Marelst and Alexei Berg, who both, as I will show later, pay for some unspecified offence. If, in the Soviet context, the fact that instead of fighting Yakov spends the war in a concentration camp may be in itself incriminating,¹⁰⁸ his role in the camp is definitely a reason for Zinger

102 *Ibidem*, p. 34.

103 *Ibidem*, p. 35.

104 Debarati Sanyal, 'A Soccer Match in Auschwitz: Passing Trauma in Holocaust Studies', in *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), pp. 23–55 (p. 24).

105 Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, p. 38.

106 See, for example, Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). In her work DeKoven Ezrahi criticises George Steiner's 1966 documentary novel *Treblinka* for being a 'revisionistic hagiography' from which emerges 'a glorified sense of Jewish superiority and revisionist nationalism.' (p. 32).

107 Robert J. Lifton, *History and Human Survival* (New York: Vintage, 1971), p. 206.

108 Amir Weiner reports that in Ukraine 'people who were locked in concentration camps were charged with passivity in the struggle against the occupiers and expelled [from the Communist Party]'. Amir Weiner, 'The Making of a Dominant Myth: The Second World War and the Construction of Political Identities within the Soviet Polity', *The Russian Review*, 55.4 (October 1996), 638–60 (p. 648).

to feel guilty, especially if his situation is illuminated by Levi's meditation on the condition of the 'crematory ravens'.¹⁰⁹ For, although Levi univocally blames the Germans for the Holocaust and insists that *Sonderkommando* members, who in any case were coerced into their job, should not be subject to moral evaluation,¹¹⁰ his judgement of the collaborating Jews has been viewed as implicitly negative. This is because Levi distinguishes between the few who rebelled, like the twelfth *Sonderkommando* at Birkenau who organised an armed revolt in October 1944,¹¹¹ and the 'miserable manual labourers of the slaughter [...] who preferred a few more weeks of life (what a life!) to immediate death'¹¹² and who were willing to and/or capable of playing a football match with the SS during a 'work break'.¹¹³ To Levi's inability to suspend his moral judgement of the *Sonderkommandos* also point his allusions to Alessandro Manzoni's novel, *The Betrothed*, set during an outbreak of plague in seventeenth-century Milan and criticising the *monatti*, as are called those removing and burying corpses.¹¹⁴ Adam Brown believes that not only can a parallel be sought between these men and the *Sonderkommandos*, but that 'Levi's intertextual reference also draws on Manzoni's judgement [of the *monatti*].'¹¹⁵ In this context, it could be proposed that, as former crematorium worker, Zinger is not meant to be solely a helpless victim deserving our sympathy, but is put in the equivocal position of both an object and an accomplice of Nazi violence. That Yakov indeed feels culpable about his (enforced) complicity with the Germans is additionally suggested by his persistent silence about his experience, which was indeed typical for the rare *Sonderkommando* survivors.¹¹⁶ Finally, Zinger's guilt is implicit in his apparent renunciation of his Jewishness and his (redemptive) support for Evdokimov.

As well as rendering his character's condition ethically equivocal, Makine reduces the specificity of Yakov's wartime experience, which he does, for example, by foregrounding his quasi-symbiotic friendship with Evdokimov. By showing Yakov to be friends with a typical peasant-soldier,¹¹⁷ the author strives to create the impression that Jews, just as the Bolsheviks had wished it, were perfectly integrated Soviet citizens, no different from their Gentile neighbours.

109 Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, p. 38.

110 *Ibidem*, p. 42.

111 *Ibidem*, pp. 41–2.

112 *Ibidem*, p. 41.

113 *Ibidem*, p. 38.

114 Brown, pp. 60–1.

115 *Ibidem*, p. 61.

116 Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, p. 34.

117 Weiner, p. 640.

Indeed, in Makine's prose the Jews have not only renounced their religion, language, tradition and culture, but also, by becoming patient, enduring, altruistic, peace-loving, tolerant, humble and resigned to their fate, embraced Soviet/Russian values, at least as these are imagined by the Franco-Russian novelist.¹¹⁸ And, even though Pyotr's and Yakov's wartime travails differ precisely due to Zinger's Jewishness, Makine reduces this cleavage by, for instance, accentuating the shared topography of the two men's experience and the silent connivance that this fact establishes between them: 'Ces noms [des villes polonaises] leur disaient beaucoup, sans commentaire. Un regard entendu, un hochement de tête suffisait.' ['For them these Polish [geographical] names, without further comment, were eloquent. A look they both understood, a tilt of the head sufficed.'] (*CPDD*, 21) The two men are also united by their inherent pacifism and distaste for violence, which, as I have been demonstrating, Makine identifies as typically Russian traits. While Pyotr resents killing and even pities the Germans he shoots at the front, Yakov proves similarly open-minded when he protects the enemies' remains from vengeance-hungry children. By reducing the difference between the Jew and the Gentile, Makine aligns his narrative of the Great Fatherland War with the official Soviet remembrance of the conflict, which, despite occasional Russocentric accents,¹¹⁹ emphasised an imagined political community characterised by non-ethnic, pan-Soviet uniformity.¹²⁰ Having said that, just as in Makine's writing where, as we will see later, the Jew invariably assumes a servile attitude towards the Russian, the official account of the Great Fatherland War never lost from sight the leading role of the Russian people. While integrating as much as possible the unique Jewish tragedy into the universal narrative of Soviet suffering and at the same time insisting on the Soviet citizens' unity in their struggle against Hitler, with Yakov's character

118 Although the analysis of the author's portrayal of the Rosenbergs in *Requiem* is beyond the scope of this book, the Soviet spies' Jewishness is never mentioned either and, what is more, Ethel and Julius are portrayed as indistinguishable from Makine's Soviet protagonists. They are simple, humble, open and kind. The narrator observes that '[Ethel] *'ressemblait à une femme russe'* ['[Ethel] resembled a Russian woman'] as she was chatting to her son while chopping vegetables (*RE*, 53). She is described as *'une femme comme les autres, une femme heureuse d'être là, dans le calme de ce moment, et de parler à son fils aîné qui restait debout'* [a woman like the rest, happy to be there, in the calm of the moment, chatting with her elder son as he stood there'] (*RE*, 53).

119 For example, during the Kremlin banquet in May 1945, Stalin famously singled out the Russian people's role in the victory over Germany. Brunstedt, p. 150. Also, as stated in the introduction to this book, on the outbreak of the war Stalin attempted to connect the German attack to the broader sweep of Russian history.

120 *Idem.*

Makine brushes aside the problem of anti-Semitic bias, be it popular or official. For example, when teasing Zinger's son Arkady, the children call him 'Rezinka', which is a nickname derived from the boys' surname and, meaning 'eraser', bears no stamp of anti-Jewish prejudice. All this is puzzling, allowing that during Khrushchev's Thaw, which is when the novel's action unravels, the media were carrying out an anti-Semitic campaign.¹²¹ Also a policy of widespread discrimination against the Jews was put in place,¹²² near total silence continued to be maintained on the Holocaust,¹²³ and anti-Zionist hysteria was reaching its zenith.¹²⁴ To top it all, Khrushchev himself was a fervent anti-Semite, as illustrated by his anti-Jewish outbursts or his personal attack on Evtushenko.¹²⁵

Returning to Makine's treatment of the Shoah, unlike in *Confession*, which adopts the survivor's vantage point, in *Requiem* the Jewish genocide is described from the perspective of a *shtrafnik* whose penal battalion is sent on a quasi-suicidal mission of liberating a concentration camp. Although due to Makine's elliptical description of the camp, whose name and location are withheld, we cannot be certain that its inmates include Jews, what speaks for it is the presence at the camp's rear of a river thick with human ashes and corpses, which in turn suggests the use of crematoria and, by connotation, of gas chambers in the camp. Yet, contrary to *Confession*, *Requiem* does not concentrate on the tragedy of the prisoners, be they Jews or non-Jews. Rather, it pays attention to the enormous sacrifice of the Red Army whose task becomes additionally arduous, if not impossible, when the Germans start using prisoners as living shields. In *Requiem* the focus is thus transferred from the Holocaust to the *shtrafnik*'s

121 Soviet media continued to reproduce notorious anti-Semitic stereotypes, including the army dodger and the rootless cosmopolitan, as well as to describe Jews as narrow-minded and hypocritical. Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews*, p. 91.

122 This concerned higher government, higher education and employment. *Idem*. Moreover, when Jews were insulted or beaten up and synagogues and Jewish cemeteries were being vandalised, these actions were 'met by silence and handled with extreme leniency by the authorities'. *Ibidem*, p. 92.

123 *Ibidem*, pp. 92–3. This is best exemplified by the persistent denial of the identity of the victims of the Babi Yar massacre.

124 Korey, 'The Origins and Development of Soviet Anti-Semitism', pp. 126–32.

125 Pinkus quotes several of Khrushchev's anti-Jewish statements. For instance, during his 1956 visit to Poland the Soviet head of state openly criticised the high percentage of Jews in the leading cadres and, looking at Roman Zambrowski (born Zuckerman), concluded: 'Yes, you have many leaders with names ending in "ski" but an Abramovich remains an Abramovich.' Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews*, p. 92. As for Evtushenko, Khrushchev went as far as inciting writers and critics to condemn the young Ukrainian poet (pp. 97–8).

plight, another taboo subject under communism. Like some of the cultural representations of the penal units that have emerged post-1991, *Requiem* lifts up the stigma attached to *shtrafniki* by the Soviet regime that represented them as 'enemies of the people' and 'bastards'.¹²⁶ The novel achieves this when it re-positions these pariahs as innocent victims of the injustice of the Soviet system, including racial prejudice. Indeed, like Vasilii Tverdokhlebov, the protagonist of the 2004 TV series *Shtrafbat* (*The Penal Battalion*), who, having miraculously escaped from German captivity, is arrested by the Russians, accused of being a spy, sent to a *gulag* and ultimately put in charge of a penal unit, Pavel and Marelst find themselves in a punishment unit for absurd reasons. And, despite the wrongs they have suffered, like Tverdokhlebov, they lose nothing of their patriotic zeal or serenity. However, whereas the TV series 'explode[s]', in Stephen Norris's words, 'virtually all the taboo subjects about Stalinism and the war that existed during the Soviet era',¹²⁷ Makine's novel is far from overtly condemning Stalin's ruthless policies. Nor does it expose the violence pervading the *shtrafniki*'s existence, including the brutality they themselves perpetuated towards civilians, soldiers from regular units or even one another.¹²⁸ Contrary to what might be expected in a novel bearing hallmarks of the postmodern questioning of prevailing narratives about the past, *Requiem* brings up the subject of *shtrafbaty* chiefly in order to stress the colossal loss of life incurred by the Red Army. Forced to launch an attack on the concentration camp without the support of artillery, the three battalions involved lose nearly six hundred men, all this to save some forty inmates. This means that it is in order to dramatise an alien agenda that *Requiem* abuses the tragedy of not only Jews but also *shtrafniki*, who were brutalised by the Nazis and the Soviet state alike. For, if in *Confession* the Red Army's role in freeing the camps is invoked only in passing when the narrator states that Yakov was lifted out of a heap of frozen corpses in a camp in 'la Pologne libérée' [the liberated Poland'] (*CPDD*, 17), *Requiem* ostentatiously promotes the image of the Soviets as Europe's — and the Jews' — saviours, echoing Stalin's famous speech in which he identified Soviet troops as the army-deliverer (*armya osvoboditel'nitsa*).¹²⁹

More broadly, such a representation of Soviet forces falls in line with the messianic tendencies of Soviet ideology and with the conception of the incursion of the Red Army into foreign territory as having a positive political

126 Stephen N. Norris, *Blockbuster History in the New Russia: Movies, Memory and Patriotism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), p. 122.

127 *Idem*. Cf. Carleton, 'Victory in Death', p. 148.

128 The series shows *shtrafniki* stealing food at gunpoint from regular troops, raping a woman who subsequently hangs herself, or fighting to the death over card games. *Idem*.

129 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 63.

influence.¹³⁰ Narrated twice in two different places of the novel, the scene of the camp's capture serves Makine, as already stated in Chapter 3, to rebuff any criticism that Western historians may level at the Soviet soldiers' wartime conduct. It is evidently with this specific aim in mind that the author creates an episode that echoes the image of girls throwing flowers at the Red Army I analysed in Chapter 2. In this scene an emaciated and staggering prisoner expresses his gratitude to an injured Soviet soldier by offering him a cup of painstakingly gathered rainwater: 'Le disciplinaire blessé vit le prisonnier, vit ses yeux noyés dans le crâne émacié, et se tut. Il n'y avait plus dans ce monde que ces deux regards qui lentement allaient l'un vers l'autre.' ['The wounded soldier saw the prisoner, saw his eyes sunken in his emaciated skull and fell silent. There was nothing more in the world, just these two pairs of eyes slowly approaching one another.'] (*RE*, 226) Further, although it was Soviet historiography that offered an impersonal, homogenising and politicised account of World War II, and denied the Holocaust victims recognition as a national group, *Requiem's* narrator perfidiously accuses Western historians of creating totalising and ideologically-biased representations of both those who fell prey to the Nazis' anti-Semitic rage and their Soviet liberators. By pointing out that even Germans recognised Jews' individuality by tattooing identification numbers on their forearms, the narrator, who is obviously ignorant of the prohibition against body modifications found in the Mosaic Law,¹³¹ inverts the meaning of the dehumanising and deeply unnatural practice that was the tattooing performed in Auschwitz.¹³² At the same time, he establishes a similarly offensive parallel between the West and the German perpetrators of anti-Jewish violence, as he also does when stating that he would have found it easier to make himself understood by a Nazi than by a contemporary Western intellectual.

'Jews Are Fighting the War in Tashkent'

Just like Makine's representation of the Holocaust, his portrayal of the Jews' participation in the Red Army seems to have, as the present section will demonstrate, imbibed the official Soviet version of World War II, and is therefore

130 Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939–1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 72. See also Tumarkin, p. 93 and p. 190.

131 Leviticus 19: 28.

132 Levi remembers the practice as highly traumatic. 'Its symbolic meaning was clear to everyone: this is an indelible mark, you will never leave here; this is the mark with which slaves are branded and cattle sent to the slaughter, and this is what you have become. You no longer have a name, this is your new name.' Levi, p. 119.

strongly political. The first impression may be, however, that by staging two Jewish soldiers who fight the Germans heroically and who both suffer more or less directly from Russian Judeophobia, Makine strives to, firstly, debunk the myth of Jews as army dodgers that prevailed in Soviet — and, before that, in tsarist — Russia and, secondly, tackle the question of anti-Semitism in the army. In Russia the preconception concerning the Jews' usefulness to the war effort originally stemmed from popular prejudice,¹³³ and, after 1941, was bolstered by German propaganda.¹³⁴ It is noteworthy that, for fear of giving people the idea that the Nazis were waging a war mainly against Jews, the Soviet state neither endorsed nor challenged the latter. The stereotype of Jews as 'laggards and shirkers'¹³⁵ or the popular saying that 'Jews are fighting the war in Tashkent'¹³⁶ hardly found reflection in reality. Although it is impossible to tell exactly how many Jews participated in the Great Fatherland War,¹³⁷ in 1939 they were overrepresented in the military, and this overrepresentation must have only increased after the USSR annexed large parts of Poland and with them acquired a significant Jewish population.¹³⁸ If Jews were underrepresented in the twenty- to twenty-four-year-old cohort as they were pursuing studies in higher education, they were heavily present in senior positions as well as in

133 Feferman, "The Jews' War", p. 575. Feferman observes that such charges were already levelled at Jews before 1917 when they were being accused of not contributing sufficiently to World War I.

134 Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews*, p. 85. For more on German anti-Jewish propaganda, see Daniel Uziel, 'Wehrmacht Propaganda Troops and the Jews', *Shoah Resource Center*, pp. 1–33 (p. 10) <http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20202021.pdf>; and Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), pp. 69–70.

135 Gitelman, 'Internationalism, Patriotism, and Disillusion', p. 96. See also Benjamin Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews*, p. 389.

136 This phrase originated in the sudden appearance of large numbers of Jews in Central Asia. These were Jews exiled from the territories annexed by the USSR in 1939–1941 and Soviet evacuees from Poland and other countries conquered by the Germans. Gitelman, 'Internationalism, Patriotism, and Disillusion', p. 100. See also Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner*, p. 120, and Weiner, p. 647.

137 Gitelman, 'Internationalism, Patriotism, and Disillusion', p. 110. This is also partially due to the fact that many Jewish fighters disguised their true identity for fear of being captured by the Germans and/or of Soviet anti-Semitism, but also because they were assimilated and did not feel Jewish. Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner*, p. 125.

138 Feferman, "The Jews' War", p. 587.

the medical, engineering and other technical corps, which was largely to do with the fact that they were urbanised and well-educated.¹³⁹

Makine first confronts anti-Semitic stereotypes relating to the Jews' ability and willingness to fight in *Requiem* that deals with both the so-called 'folk anti-Semitism'¹⁴⁰ and the officially-sponsored anti-Jewish bias. On meeting Marelst, Pavel's first reaction to his comrade is one of distrust based on popular prejudice: "Il est juif", pensa Pavel, et il ressentit ce mélange de déception et de défiance dont il ne connaissait pas lui-même la source.' ["He's Jewish", thought Pavel and experienced a mixture of disappointment and distrust, derived from a source of which he himself was unaware.'] (*RE*, 167) Yet, thoughtful and open-minded as he is, Pavel immediately probes the origins of his resentment, or perhaps rather tries to justify it. Firstly, he attributes his latent Judeophobia to his own nationality, whereby Makine admits that anti-Semitism has traditionally played a major role in creating Russian identity, the Jew embodying the Other necessary to define and delineate the self. Indeed, Pavel explains his negative feelings as a manifestation of the primitive and natural suspicion towards the difference of the Other, be s/he a Jew or someone from the other end of the village. He then blames his reaction on the widespread anti-Jewish sentiment, but observes that the prejudices that were inculcated in him in childhood were purely theoretical, since no-one in his village had even seen a Jew. Moreover, some of these racist stereotypes, like the one concerning the Jews' greed, were to be subsequently ridiculed. For how could Jews rake in money with both hands, if the only representative of this racial/religious minority that Pavel knew had lost one arm in combat? The man's status as war veteran may have also challenged the protagonist's preconception that at the front Jews stay behind the lines or are in the supply corps, an *idée reçue* reiterated by Russian respondents of a 1950–1951 survey who believed Jews to be 'cowards serv[ing] only in the rear of the army'.¹⁴¹ Pavel begins to radically modify his grossly stereotyped image of the Jews when he meets Jewish soldiers recovering in hospitals or fighting on the front line. However, it is only the protagonist's encounter with Marelst, who is frank, brave and, crucially, capable of critical distance towards his privileged background, that makes the protagonist definitely revise his former opinion.

139 Gitelman, 'Internationalism, Patriotism, and Disillusion', p. 101.

140 Korey, 'The Origins and Development of Soviet Anti-Semitism', p. 111.

141 Quoted by Korey, 'The Origins and Development of Soviet Anti-Semitism', p. 112. Like Pavel, those interviewed were also convinced that Jews were money-minded, sly, calculating, pushy, clannish, dishonest, aggressive, or that they knew how 'to use a situation'. Cf. Feferman, "The Jews' War", p. 575.

As well as being a victim of popular anti-Semitism, Marelst suffers from official anti-Jewish sentiments that although, according to Yitzhak Arad, absent as a policy, did exist as an undercurrent in the Red Army.¹⁴² Notwithstanding his overview of the situation in the military, Arad invokes numerous cases of discrimination against Jewish fighters when it came to promotion or to the award of the title of the Hero of the Soviet Union.¹⁴³ He also quotes blood-curdling examples of anti-Jewish violence in the ranks of the Red Army, which became even more frequent after the liberation of Ukraine, Byelorussia and the Baltic States, whose citizens had been indoctrinated by Nazi propaganda and, perhaps more importantly, witnessed the Germans' humiliation and inhuman treatment of the Jews.¹⁴⁴ Additionally, Arad notes that information regarding Jews who distinguished themselves in combat and received medals was suppressed, even though these awards were more numerous than those won by other ethnic groups mentioned in the reports.¹⁴⁵ To add insult to injury, in 1943 an order named after Bogdan Chmielnicki, the leader of a seventeenth-century pogrom, was established.¹⁴⁶ Arad concludes, however, that when Jews and Gentiles fought together and experienced the same hardship, 'overt, crude anti-Semitism was neither widespread nor significant'.¹⁴⁷ This view is corroborated by *Requiem's* narrator who, while acknowledging the persistence of anti-Semitism in ordinary units, states that the *shtrafniki's* increased exposure to death erased the importance of race, origin and social status, reducing men to their bare humanity. Indeed, before his transfer to a punishment battalion Marelst suffers from anti-Jewish bigotry, as can be inferred from his observation that the *politruk* of his unit 'n'aimait pas [s]a tête' ['loathed [his] guts'] (*RE*, 166). The implicitly anti-Semitic tone of this statement means that Marelst is sent to near-certain death on racist grounds.¹⁴⁸ Ironically, the pretext under which the Jewish soldier is stripped of his decorations and disciplined is his refusal to shout Stalin's name on command, although, to commemorate the day the world saw Stalin cry as he was mourning Lenin, Marelst's father

142 Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner*, p. 115.

143 *Ibidem*, p. 116.

144 *Ibidem*, pp. 121–23. These cases were so prominent that in 1943 Ilya Ehrenburg raised the issue at a JAFC meeting. *Ibidem*, p. 124.

145 *Idem*.

146 *Ibidem*, p. 118.

147 *Ibidem*, p. 125.

148 Edele records a testimony of a Jewish soldier who stated: 'If I would not be a Jew I would be an important person [*bolshoi chelovek*], but like that in the army I was only a lieutenant, although I could have been a major.' Edele, 'Soviet Veterans as an Entitlement Group, 1945–1955', p. 118, n. 31.

included the generalissimo's initial in his newborn's first name. In Marelst's rebellious gesture one can thus recognise his rejection of his privileged background, of his father and, by proxy, of his Jewishness.

In fact, Marelst's entire story may be read as one of revolt against his bourgeois origins, which, considering the exceptionally large proportion of Jews among high-ranking communist officials in the 1920s and 1930s, is quasi-synonymous with his Jewish identity.¹⁴⁹ The protagonist is introduced into the novel as irremediably marked by his past of 'un gosse de riches [...] gavé comme une dinde' ['a rich kid [...] force-fed [...] like a turkey'] (*RE*, 166), who, accustomed to eating well, at the front swaps his ration of vodka for food. Yet, although he may still be prisoner of his upbringing on the physical level, Marelst has made a mental break with his past by, for instance, volunteering for the front. His intellectual break with his origins is also symbolised by the fact that, to roll up cigarettes, Marelst uses pages from a notebook in which he wrote poems and which is the only vestige of his prewar life. Marelst's story thus illustrates the case of Jews who joined the army in the hope of erasing the stain on their reputation,¹⁵⁰ as opposed to those who did so out of bare necessity as they knew what fate awaited them if the Germans prevailed, or those who wished to prove themselves as fighters to their Gentile comrades.¹⁵¹ That Marelst's guilt indeed has its sources in his father's moral corruption is evidenced by the protagonist's childhood memory of eating cream cakes while ordinary people were starving, or of travelling in a comfortable sleeper on his way to a holiday in Crimea while women and children were being deported in cattle trains.

The Jewish protagonist's successful separation from his past is communicated with a sequence of scenes overlaid with Christian symbolism. The first of these shows Marelst carrying the steel base for the mortar, which, heavy and awkward to balance, brings to mind the cross carried by Christ. As if the image really signified the Jew's Christian conversion, it has the power to once and for all alter Pavel's mind about his comrade. Perceiving the Jew's back as '[u]n dos comme un autre, [...] un soldat traînant ses pieds fatigués dans la poussière d'une route de guerre' ['[a] back like any other, [...] a soldier dragging his feet in the dust of a road in wartime'] (*RE*, 168), Pavel suddenly ceases to find his comrade abject. This implicit comparison of Marelst to a Christ approaching the moment of his ultimate sacrifice further diminishes the gap between Jews and Russians. This is because, as we have already seen several times, in Makine's writing the Russian soldier's sufferings are frequently modelled on

149 Korey, 'The Origins and Development of Soviet Anti-Semitism', p. 116.

150 Feferman, "'The Jews' War", pp. 570–90.

151 *Ibidem*, p. 584.

Christ's passion, as it was in postwar Soviet art where the soldier or partisan would often be portrayed as Christ crucified or just descended from the cross, while his mother would be cast as the classic *bogomater*. If, according to Tumarkin, such use of Christian iconography was intent on representing the victims of Nazi atrocities as 'true martyrs, deserving the highest veneration',¹⁵² in *Requiem*, apart from anticipating Marelst's martyrdom, the image styled on the Road to Calvary scene signifies, I believe, the Jew's deculturation and assimilation. Such a reading could be supported with Dostoyevsky's conception of Russianness as having its foundation in Christianity, which Makine evidently promulgates despite the apparent godlessness of the post-1917 world he depicts. Moreover, with his representation of Jews, Makine seems to subscribe to the view championed by one of Dostoyevsky's critics, Arsenii Gulyga, who believed that anyone could embrace typically Russian characteristics, such as kindness, hospitality and responsiveness, and thus become Russian.¹⁵³ The understanding of the scene showing Marelst weighed down by a cross-like object as his conversion to Russianness is confirmed by the episode where Pavel and Marelst each carry a wounded soldier. The symmetry between the two men, who are represented as equally patriotic and loyal to their comrades, indicates their likeness, if not sameness. Finally, after Marelst's 'confession' consisting of revealing the story of his father's ideological awakening, rise to power, corruption and fall from grace, and his own consequent sense of guilt and desire for redemption, Pavel begins to see the Jewish soldier simply as a human being no different from himself. The motif of the sky present in this scene additionally confirms, as we saw in the story of Wilfried Almendinner, the irrelevance of national differences:

Pavel se disait qu'en temps de paix ils ne se seraient jamais rencontrés, et même en se rencontrant, ne se seraient jamais compris. 'Un Léningradois, aurait pensé Pavel avec suspicion, fils d'un ministre ...' [...] Pavel comprit soudain qu'il n'y avait plus rien d'autres: une nuit, un homme, une voix. Tout le reste était inventé en temps de paix ... L'homme n'était que cette voix nue sous le ciel.

152 As examples of such art Tumarkin invokes Mikhail Savitskii's painting *Partisan Madonna* (1967) or Tatyana Nazarenko's *The Partisans Have Arrived* (1976). Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, pp. 140–41.

153 Dmitry Shlapentokh, 'Russian Nationalism and Soviet Intellectuals under Gorbachev', in *The Search for Self-Definition in Russian Literature*, ed. by Eva Thompson (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 120–37 (p. 126).

[Pavel told himself that in peacetime they would have never met and even if they had met they would have never understood one another. 'A man from Leningrad', Pavel would have thought with suspicion, 'the son of a minister ...' [...] Pavel suddenly understood that there was nothing else: darkness, a man, a voice. Everything else was a peacetime invention ... Man was simply this naked voice beneath the sky.]

RE, 174

The Jew's Redemptive *Phoria*

The act of carrying, which is in focus in the two afore-examined scenes, can allude not only to Christ's passion but also to the legend of Saint Christopher, which, as I will endeavour to show in the remaining part of this chapter, structures Makine's representation of all three Jewish protagonists examined here. I will argue that the recurrent motif of carrying signals the three men's conversion to Christian, or rather, considering the atheism of the author's novelistic universe, Russian/Soviet values. Like the ogre who bore Christ in the guise of a child across a treacherous river, Yakov carries Pyotr on his back and then in his arms as if he were a child. Similarly, Berg lugs his injured superior, General Gavrillov, to safety. Concentrating on these two cases, in this and the following section I will posit the Jew's consistent, albeit implicit, comparison to Saint Christopher as hardly favourable. This is because, firstly, it establishes an unflattering parallel between the Jewish protagonists and the Satan-serving giant with all his negative connotations, and, secondly, it places Jews in an inferior position in relation to indigenous Russians. Additionally, I will demonstrate that the repeated reference to Saint Christopher's conversion and martyrdom ultimately allows Makine to champion the Soviet cause at the expense of the Jews. To substantiate this claim, I will show that in the process of re-presenting the Red Army and, more generally, the Soviet Union as a Christ-like victim and saviour, Makine's prose operates a malign inversion of the paradigm established by Michel Tournier's rewriting of the Saint Christopher story and hence denies the Jews the sympathy they generally incite in the post-Holocaust world.

According to the legend, the future saint was an ogre dedicated to serving the Devil, his name Reprobos signifying 'outcast'.¹⁵⁴ Eager to assist the most powerful of kings, he took up the role of a ferryman, which, according to

¹⁵⁴ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 396–400 (p. 396).

Arlette Bouloumié, links him to Charon transporting dead souls to the other bank of the Styx and, consequently, casts him as an agent of death.¹⁵⁵ It is only when he starts serving Christ that Saint Christopher becomes a protector of life: the giant's funeral powers are thus turned into salutary *phoria*, a term forged by Tournier to signify the act of carrying that organises his own rewriting of the legend in *Le Roi des aulnes*. However, in Tournier's dark tale that retraces the prewar and wartime fortunes of Abel Tiffauges, a morally- and sexually-dubious character who is intertextually related to the wife-killer Bluebeard, to the children-killer Erl-King and even to Hitler himself,¹⁵⁶ *phoria* is an ambiguous concept. This is because, before ultimately trying to save Ephraïm, a Holocaust child-victim whom he finds by the roadside and takes to safety, Tiffauges carries off children to a *Hitlerjugend* training academy so that they may die later in battle. As we will now see, in Makine's fiction the notion of *phoria* is interpreted more straightforwardly, as it invariably signifies the Jew's disavowal of his cultural, linguistic and religious difference, and his correlated espousal of Russian/Soviet ideals. In addition, Makine's intertextual use of the Saint Christopher story, which since the 1970 publication of *Le Roi des aulnes* has been inevitably tainted with Tiffauges's paedophile passion and death-bearing powers, puts the Jew in the role of, firstly, a social outcast and, secondly, a malevolent giant tarnished, as in Yakov's case, with his unwitting collaboration with the Nazis. To redeem himself, the Jew must let the Christ-like Russian tame him, even if, as it is the case of Tiffauges who perishes at the end of the novel,¹⁵⁷ the process of submission must require the Jew's symbolic or actual (self-)annihilation.

This narrative pattern already undercuts the story of Zinger whose frightening physique, ambiguous role in the concentration camp and inherent strength, inferred from the fact that Jews were selected for *Sonderkommandos* for their build and fitness, all align him with the legendary Satan-serving ogre. Another parallel between Zinger and Saint Christopher can be noticed in the dreamlike sequence showing the Jew carrying his Gentile neighbour in his arms, so that Evdokimov may finally have a taste of farm work. If the tall grass undulating around Yakov's legs invokes the fast-flowing stream across which

155 Arlette Bouloumié, 'Germanic Variations on the Theme of Phoria in *The Erl-King* (The Influence of Nietzsche, Bach and Mithraism)', in *Michel Tournier*, ed. by Michael Worton (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995), pp. 126–45 (p. 136).

156 S. Lillian Kremer, *Holocaust Literature: An Encyclopaedia of Writers and Their Work*, vol. 2 (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 1270.

157 For an analysis of the final chapter of *Le Roi des aulnes*, see Susan Petit, *Michel Tournier's Metaphysical Fictions* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 25–46.

Christopher bore Christ, the giant's 'dire distress' as the child became 'as heavy as lead' is reflected in Zinger's evident effort:¹⁵⁸ 'Sur sa tempe battait une grosse veine sombre. On sentait une lourde fatigue dans la courbe de ses épaules, dans ses jambes tendues ...' ['A thick dark vein throbbed on his temple. A deep weariness could be sensed in the curve of his back, his tensed legs.'] (*CPDD*, 158) Finally, the analogy between *Confession*'s Jewish protagonist and the legendary ogre can be detected in Makine's description of Pyotr and Yakov as 'un seul homme' ['a single man'], 'grand et fortement bâti' ['tall and well-built'] (*CPDD*, 18, 109), which can be read as an allusion to the mythical Christ-bearer's exceptional height and impressive posture.¹⁵⁹

Yakov's story may be considered as a reference to not only the Saint Christopher legend itself but also Tournier's take on it in *Le Roi des aulnes*, which, like *Confession*, recasts the ancient story in the context of World War II and the Holocaust. Moreover, in both novels the Jew shares with the Gentile his experience of, to borrow Edith Wyschogrod's term, the 'death world':¹⁶⁰ while Ephraïm reveals to his saviour the murderous face of the regime Tiffauges has been serving, telling him about the systematic extermination of Jews and Gypsies, Dr Mengele's medical experiments, gas chambers or the warehouses that held the possessions of those having been gassed,¹⁶¹ Yakov talks to Pyotr about the atrocities he witnessed as his oppressor's unwilling accomplice. Indeed, both Tournier and Makine explore the collaborator's role in the concentrationary universe,¹⁶² and both deal with the collaborator's attempt to redeem himself, as exemplified by Tiffauges's efforts to save Ephraïm, and by the services Yakov provides to his Gentile neighbour. Another similarity between the two texts lies in the way the characters performing the *phoric* act perish: while Tiffauges, overwhelmed by the Jewish child's weight, drags Ephraïm with him into his watery grave as he drowns, Makine represents Zinger's and Evdokimov's deaths as mutually contingent: '[L]a mort [de Pyotr] ne surprie personne. [...] Ils étaient, lacha et lui, comme un seul homme. L'un parti, l'autre ne pouvait plus tarder ...' ['[Pyotr's] death took no one by surprise. [...] They were like a single man, Yasha and he. Once one was gone, the other couldn't linger on ...'] (*CPPD*, 98) Given these striking parallels between the two novels,

158 de Vorraine, p. 389.

159 *Idem*.

160 Edith Wyschogrod, *Spirit in Ashes: Hegel, Heidegger, and Man-Made Mass Death* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 15.

161 Tournier, *Le Roi des aulnes*, pp. 374–76.

162 See Sara R. Horowitz, *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), p. 183.

one could argue that Makine redraws the Star of David, into which Ephraïm metamorphoses before Tiffauges's eyes as the giant sinks into the bog, as the five-pointed star symbolising in general the Soviet Union and in particular the Red Army, which in *Confession* is represented precisely by Evdokimov. When thus intertextually illuminated, Makine's second novel reveals that in his portrayal of the Holocaust the author is driven by his own ideological concerns. Notably, *Confession* inverts the paradigm established by *Le Roi des aulnes*, which, in Omer Bartov's view, repositis Jews as victims,¹⁶³ and hence challenges the role attributed to them in Christian theology, tradition and fantasy.¹⁶⁴ To expand on this, Makine reverses the Jew's and the Gentile's roles in the *phoric* act, identifying the Russian with Christ and the Jew with the ogre who must be tamed and converted to the 'right path'. This means that the Soviet soldier's suffering takes the position occupied in Tournier's novel and, more broadly, in Europe's post-Holocaust imagination, by the victimhood of the Jews.

A similar narrative pattern can be observed in the other two novels under analysis where the Jew becomes a heroic character not so much through his frontline exploits as by serving the Russians, in the process of which he invariably forsakes his identity. In *Requiem* Marelst performs the *phoric* act on four different occasions, including the two scenes which I discussed earlier in this chapter and which show him carrying the base for the mortal and then a wounded soldier on his back. The third act of *phoria* takes place already after the protagonist's death, when his body acts as a bridge for his comrades storming the camp, whereby it literally paves the soldiers' way across the abhorrent waters of a stagnant stream. Thick with decaying corpses and human ashes, the stream recalls both the 'famous river, where many people, trying to get across, go under and perish'¹⁶⁵ from the Saint Christopher legend and the marshes which ultimately swallow Tiffauges. As the final instance of Marelst's redemptory *phoria* I consider the scene examined in Chapter 3, where *Requiem*'s narrator (ab)uses the Jewish soldier's tragedy to hail the Red Army's pivotal role and martyrdom during World War II.

163 Omer Bartov, *The 'Jew' in Cinema: from The Golem to Don't Touch My Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 114.

164 See, for example, Sartre; or Weingrad's re-reading of Julia Kristeva's and René Girard's work. Weingrad, pp. 87–91 and pp. 91–5.

165 de Voraigue, p. 398.

From Superfluous Man to Homo Sovieticus

The motif of salutary *phoria* returns again in *La Musique* where it is reinforced by one of the author's favoured themes, namely that of rebirth and change of identity.¹⁶⁶ Set during the war and its immediate aftermath, Makine's seventh novel follows a young pianist whose life and career are shattered in May 1941 when, on the eve of his first public performance, his parents, a playwright and an actress tenuously linked to the circles of power, are unexpectedly arrested. In line with Stalin's belief that an apple does not fall far from the apple tree,¹⁶⁷ like Marelst, whose death is represented as the price he must pay for his family' belonging to the political establishment, Berg suffers for his mother's and father's sin of being part of the country's cultural elite and for their correlated bourgeois lifestyle, whose tokens are an individual apartment, a piano, a private car and a housekeeper. Also, just as Marelst has a premonition that one day he will have to repent for the cream pastry he was still savouring while watching the deportation of people deemed *kulaks*, Alexei's fate is foretold by the son of a State Security officer who threatens the young pianist and insults him by calling him 'intelligentsia pourrie' ['rotten intelligentsia'] (*MV*, 50).¹⁶⁸ Yet, although both protagonists seem to be redeeming their parents' privileged social status, the high proportion of Jews among Soviet elites during the 1920s and 1930s,¹⁶⁹ on the one hand, and the two young men's subsequent renunciation of their origins, on the other, indicate that their fault lies principally in their Jewishness. Indeed, just like Marelst, Alexei is haunted by an unspecified sense of guilt, which can be inferred from the mnemonic association between the scene showing him watching the windows of his apartment as it is being searched following his parents' arrest and his earlier benign transgression: looking into his flat from across the courtyard, Alexei is suddenly overcome by 'cette sensation vaguement criminelle' ['that vaguely criminal feeling'] that

166 This theme is also present in *Le Testament*, *Requiem* and *L'Homme inconnu*.

167 Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 69–70.

168 This and all the following translations of quotations from *La Musique d'une vie* come from *A Life's Music*, trans. by Geoffrey Strachan (London: Sceptre, 2002).

169 Jews were overrepresented in both the Communist Party and the Party leadership, with 15% of the 11th Party Congress and twenty percent of the 1926 Politburo being composed of Jews. Jeffrey Veidlinger, 'The Jewish Question in the Soviet Union, 1917–1953', in *Russian and Soviet History: From the Time of Troubles to the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, ed. by Steven A. Usitalo and William Benton Whisenhunt (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), pp. 215–28 (p. 187).

accompanied the first cigarette he smoked in the very spot that is now his observation post (MV, 48). It is also of note that the description of the young pianist's flight from his home resonates with that of the suicide of Marelst's father, which, as already stated, is represented as the corrupt *apparatchik's* due punishment:

Dans les rues, puis dans les couloirs du métro, à la gare [Alexei] croyait *s'enfoncer toujours dans la spirale glauque de la cage d'escalier*, esquiver les portes qui risquaient à tout moment de s'ouvrir. [...] Il ne courait pas, il *chutait*.

[In the streets, then in the corridors of the metro, and at the station, [Alexei] still felt as if he were *thrusting downwards in the murky spiral of that stairwell*, dodging past doors that threatened to open at any moment. [...] He was not running, he was *falling*.]

MV, 53, emphasis added

Notwithstanding these analogies between the two novels, unlike that of Marelst's father, Alexei's prolonged downfall ends with a figurative rather than actual death. The latter is signified with the pianist's escape from Moscow to Ukrainian countryside where he finds shelter. His hiding place — a dark, contiguous and windowless nook that is made out of wooden planks — unmistakably invokes a coffin, but also a womb, from which, like many other Makinean protagonists, Alexei will be reborn. Indeed, as for Marelst, who cuts himself off from his background by volunteering for the front, or for Zinger, who is symbolically reborn when rescued from a heap of corpses by Soviet soldier, for Berg the war becomes an opportunity to experience a 'resurrection'. And, like for the other two characters, for Berg this 'rebirth' also consists in shedding his Jewishness for the sake of a Russian identity. Appropriately, the protagonist's 'resurrection' is permeated with allusions to Christ's rising from the dead: after leaving his 'grave', Alexei takes exactly two days to find a man whose identity he will usurp.¹⁷⁰ The protagonist's subsequent transmogrification into Sergei Maltsev reflects the extremely close, albeit unlikely, friendships between Zinger and Evdokimov, or that between Marelst and Pavel. Additionally, like Pyotr and

170 For the trope of Resurrection in Makine's writing see Helena Duffy, 'L'écrivain ne se meurt pas ou la Résurrection dans l'oeuvre d'Andreï Makine', in *Autour des écrivains franco-russes*, ed. by Murielle Lucie Clément (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008), pp. 153–67. In this essay I examine the story of Alyosha of *Le Testament*, a penniless and homeless Russian exile who sleeps rough at the cemetery before being 'reborn' as a French novelist.

Pavel who, coincidentally, are named after the fathers of the Christian church, the dead man Alexei pretends to be is an archetypal Russian peasant. That for Berg the *quid pro quo* signifies social degradation is suggested by the fact that his feet are larger than the dead soldier's (Maltsev's boots are too small for Alexei), or by the meaning of the protagonist's original and adopted surnames. While the German noun 'Berg' means 'mountain', Maltsev derives from the Russian adjective 'maly' that signifies 'small' or even 'insignificant'. The utter simplicity and, at the same time, falseness of the protagonist's new identity are then conveyed by a metonymic slide from a plywood cut-out of a Soviet officer's face, which Berg uses to flush out a German sniper, to the protagonist himself who now has no past, no family and, as it seems, no feelings of any kind. That this is so transpires from the scene following the sniper's death: in an adjacent room Berg finds a piano, but, to his surprise and satisfaction, the instrument leaves him indifferent. It is on this occasion that Alexei notes his newly-found freedom from nostalgia for his former self, which actualises as the transformation of his musician's hands into the scarred and callus-covered hands of a battle-hardened soldier. In short, the scene testifies to the completeness of Alexei's metamorphosis and, importantly, to the pleasure that he himself derives from his change.

Berg's transformation from a bourgeois and a Jew into a *homo sovieticus*, a human type of which, as the novel's opening suggests, he is meant to be a representative, can only be fully accomplished once the protagonist has found maternal and paternal figures in ordinary Russians. This happens after Berg suffers a serious head injury that leaves his face barred by a deep scar, a detail symbolising the protagonist's break with his past or perhaps even alluding to the practice of circumcision, which in itself may be considered as the male child's separation from maternal impurity and defilement.¹⁷¹ Like Demidov's symbolic resurrection in *La Fille*, the scene in question is suffused with psychoanalytical resonances and in particular with references to the mirror stage, as Berg contemplates his bare and ageless cranium in a looking glass. And, as if Alexei were indeed a small child precariously balancing between dependence on the mother and a desire for psychic and physical autonomy, the doctor discharging him speaks to him in soft tones and simple language, and, unaware that an all-powerful Father has once and for all banished his patient from the comfort zone of maternal love and care, sends him back to his mother's. As though he were following the doctor's advice, Berg finds a maternal substitute in an older woman who, characteristically, will occupy the ambiguous place between solicitude and voluptuousness. Fittingly, the couple's relationship

171 Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), p. 118.

begins at a cemetery where Alexei collapses on top of the fresh grave of the woman's child before replacing the tiny coffin on the sled that the bereaved mother used to take her offspring on its final journey. Like an infant emerging from the *Innenwelt* into the *Umwelt*, Berg, having come to, takes stock of his body and his environment, contemplating his condition and the wintry landscape surrounding him.

Logically, from the maternal zone which, wordless yet full of sensations, brings to mind the space of the child's pre-Oedipal union with the mother that Kristeva has termed semiotic *chora*,¹⁷² Alexei progresses towards a paternal figure before ultimately losing the Oedipal battle against the punitive and all-mighty Father of the Soviet state. The man playing the paternal role is General Gavrilov who unintentionally protects Berg by employing him as his chauffeur at the time when the death toll among the rank-and-file soldiers is particularly high. After the car accident in which Gavrilov suffers serious injuries, Berg, Saint Christopher-like, carries his superior for hours on his back across Austrian marshland. The *phoric* act is thus once accompanied by aquatic scenery: bowed under the General's considerable weight, Alexei trudges through 'une forêt humide, striée de petits courants d'eau glaciale.' ['a wet forest streaked with little streams of icy water:'] (*MV*, 88) Even if one of his eyes is trained on a signpost pointing towards Salzburg, rather than defecting to the West, which would have given him a chance to return to his pre-war self and, as suggested by the reference to Mozart's birthplace, resume his pianistic career, Berg continues to serve his ungrateful masters and keeps walking towards his country's victory that inevitably means his own martyrdom. In reward for Berg's self-sacrifice Gavrilov asks his chauffeur to consider him as his father, which is the penultimate step in the protagonist's assimilation, the final one being his protracted oppression by the Soviet state, which follows the disclosure of Berg's true identity. The Jew's metamorphosis into an archetypal Soviet man who is, in the Russian tradition of unjust suffering, tormented by the authorities yet content with his lot, is paralleled by the turning of his parents' private flat into a *kommunalka*. Meanwhile, Berg himself becomes a servant of a man who, like his family before the war, possesses a spacious individual apartment, a housekeeper, a private car and, importantly, a piano on which, ironically, Gavrilov's capricious and selfish daughter teaches her father's chauffeur a few simple tunes.

La Musique's denouement reveals the effects of Berg's transformation from a confident and hopeful young artist who, in the context of the Russian literary tradition, could be considered an instance of the 'superfluous man' featured

172 Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp. 22–30.

by the works of Turgenev, Pushkin or Lermontov,¹⁷³ into a *homo sovieticus*. Lampooning Zinovev's scorn for the new Soviet man, whom the exile philosopher considered immoral, deprived of initiative and desiring to be part of the collective in order to be relieved of individual responsibility,¹⁷⁴ Makine insists on his compatriots' intrinsic humility, patience, resilience and propensity for suffering (*priterpelost*). To illustrate it, he opens *La Musique* with the image of a snow-bound railway station where passengers, resigned to their lot, are tirelessly waiting for a hugely delayed train. It is from this seemingly homogeneous human mass, described as 'ce magma humain qui respire comme un seul être' ['this human matter, breathing like a single organism'] and characterised by 'son résignation, [...] son oubli inné du confort, [...] 'son endurance face à l'absurde', [its resignation, its innate disregard of comfort, its endurance in the face of the absurd'] (*MV*, 19), that Makine wheedles out his novel's protagonist. To have merited his creator's attention, Berg has had to trace the positively valorised movement from private life and fulfilment of individual ambition to the submission to authority and the collective; having served a thirteen-year sentence in a hard labour camp beyond the Arctic Circle and then having been banned from settling in any big Soviet city, Berg has lost all hope of playing the piano professionally ever again. His only indulgence is an occasional clandestine trip to Moscow where, after a train journey lasting many hours, if not days, he attends a classical concert, asks the news of Gavrilov's daughter and, once she is dead, of her son for whom he secretly provides.

Conclusions

By showing Berg as serene after all, *La Musique's* ending suggests his metamorphosis into a true Soviet citizen, which in Makine's oeuvre is synonymous

173 First popularised by Ivan Turgenev with his *Diary of a Superfluous Man* (1850), the term is most frequently exemplified with Pushkin's character of Evgenii Onegin. Interestingly, like Onegin, other superfluous men came from 'the "tainted", false atmosphere of the city, often from the westernised St. Petersburg.' In Russian *belles lettres* the superfluous man is a nonconformist and an individualist, 'an ineffectual aristocrat at odds with society [...] "dreamy, useless" [...], an "intellectual incapable of action", an "ineffective idealist", "a hero who is sensitive to social and ethical problems, but who fails to act, partly because of personal weakness, partly because of political and social restraints on his freedom and action'. Ellen Chances, 'The Superfluous Man in Russian Literature', in *Routledge Companion to Russian Literature*, ed. by Neil Cornwell (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 111–22 (p. 113 and p. 112).

174 Barańczak, p. 17.

with a patient and silent acceptance of the yoke of the state's relentless repression, to have been successfully accomplished. As my analysis in the present chapter intended to reveal, so is the case of Makine's two other Jewish protagonists who also undergo a process of acculturation and who also must repudiate their identity and espouse Soviet values. Yet, it must be said that even if Makine's oeuvre systematically dispossesses its Jewish heroines and heroes of a distinct past and cultural heritage, and portrays them as virtually indistinguishable from indigenous Russians, it is far from promulgating the racist stereotypes of comic, exotic, cowardly, avaricious, threatening or even diabolical Jews found in the works of nineteenth-century Russian writers, such as Gogol,¹⁷⁵ Dostoyevsky¹⁷⁶ or Pushkin.¹⁷⁷ Conversely, the novelist's work indisputably falls in line with the literature produced by non-Jews in Soviet Russia, where Jewish women and men have a peripheral presence and where, rather than being explicitly identified, their ethnicity is barely hinted at with Jewish-sounding names and characteristics.¹⁷⁸ Like in many Socialist Realist novels, in Makine's work Judaism seems to be a relic of the past and so is anti-Semitism, which the author represents as a set of outdated prejudices that any Russian, including an uneducated country lad, is easily capable of re-examining, challenging, ridiculing and eventually consigning to oblivion.

Just as Makine's figurations of Jews in general reflect the postrevolutionary assimilationist trend present in official policy and mirrored by literature, his

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- 175 Elena M. Katz, *Neither with Them, Nor without Them: The Russian Writer and the Jew in the Age of Realism* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008), pp. 32–120. Katz exemplifies negative stereotypes in Gogol's work with the character of Yankel in the historical romance *Taras Bulba* (1842). Yankel functions as the antithesis of the eponymous Cossack and, consequently, occupies 'an inferior position in the human family'. He is represented as "a grotesquely comic type" and as "ludicrous, treacherous and obsequious" (p. 29).
- 176 *Ibidem*, pp. 121–93. See also Gary Rosenshield, 'Dostoevskii's "The Funeral of the Universal Man" and "An Isolated Case" and Chekhov's "Rothschild's Fiddle": The Jewish Question', *The Russian Review*, 56.4 (1997), 487–504; or 'Isa Fomich Bumshtein: The Representation of the Jew in Dostoyevsky's Major Fiction', *The Russian Review*, 43.3 (1984), 261–76.
- 177 As an example one can cite the moneylender Solomon, 'a nefarious villain ready to resort to any means to amass wealth' in Pushkin's *The Covetous Knight*. Rosenshield, 'Isa Fomich Bumshtein', p. 262.
- 178 Pinkus notes that during the postwar period 'even those Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian writers [of non-Jewish origin] who did touch on the Jews made almost no reference to national symbols, Jewish motifs, specific Jewish qualities or the link with the national past.' Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews*, p. 390. See also Efraim Sicher, *Jews in Russian Literature after the October Revolution: Artists and Writers between Hope and Apostasy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); or Jacob Blum and Vera Rich, *The Image of the Jew in Soviet Literature: The Post-Stalin Period* (New York: Ktav, 1984).

novelistic treatment of the Jews' role during the Great Fatherland War follows, as I have demonstrated, the official Soviet line on both the Holocaust and the Jewish commitment to defeating fascism. This means that in Makine's work Jewish military experience is neatly embedded in the pan-Soviet history of the war, while Jewish fighters are deliberately de-Judaised. As for the catastrophe that befell Soviet Jewry in 1941, the Franco-Russian author either addresses it obliquely, as illustrated by *Requiem*, or, worse still, creates a protagonist whose survival in the camp depended on the annihilation of his fellow Jews. This implication of the Jews in the genocide that targeted them disturbingly reiterates the deeply insulting Soviet equation of Zionism and Nazism, or the preposterous accusation that during the war Zionists colluded with the Germans.¹⁷⁹ To Makine's overall derogatory portrayal of the Jew contributes his intertextual use of the Saint Christopher legend, which emphasises the need for the Jew's cultural and ideological conversion, a need suggestive of the inferiority of Jewish to Russian identity and values. In the novels examined in this chapter the Jew is thus repeatedly cast as an infidel, an outcast or even a monster, guilty, like Saint Christopher, of collaboration with the Devil, who in *Confession* is fleshed out by the Nazis and in *Requiem* and *La Musique* by the Jewish-dominated Soviet establishment of the 1920s and 1930s. This means that while apparently trying to discredit condescending images of Jews, as he manifestly does in *Requiem*, the author inadvertently contributes to the reinforcement of many of the Soviet-time stereotypes, which, it needs specifying, are not all negative. And so Makine portrays the Jews as occupying favoured positions in Soviet society (Marelst's and Berg's parents), being deceitful and dishonest (Berg usurping Maltsev's identity), not drinking alcohol (Marelst), making good musicians (Berg, Faya Moysseyevna) or being smart and intellectually oriented (Yakov Zinger, the Bergs).¹⁸⁰ Briefly, the Jews' greatest fault is, as I have argued throughout this chapter, their identity that they must renounce and redeem by — literally — demonstrating their willingness to become Russian in the way Reprobis became a Christian. But, in Makine's writing the Jew's union with the Russian transcends the reconciliation between the Christian and the Jew envisaged by the famously Jew-hating Dostoyevsky who saw it as 'based on love, forgiveness and mutual understanding.'¹⁸¹ Rather, the Jew must acknowledge his inferiority before, like Saint Christopher, committing an act of self-immolation. For this is the only way s/he can earn a place — however

179 Gitelman, 'History, Memory and Politics', pp. 33–4.

180 Korey, *The Soviet Cage*, p. 5.

181 Rosenshield, 'Dostoevskii's "The Funeral of the Universal Man" and "An Isolated Case" and Chekhov's "Rothschild's Fiddle"', p. 492.

modest — in Makine's novelistic universe whose protagonists all strive towards the Soviet ideal of an ordinary woman or man capable of most heroic deeds but never expecting any recognition for her/his bravery.

All this may be surprising given that Makine's writing has much in common — both formally and philosophically — with the postmodern novel that programmatically adopts a de-centered perspective on the past, narrating the latter from the margins of official historiography. In the Russian context the Jews are the perfect 'ex-centrics', having been the despised and victimised Other at least since Catherine the Great and having been deprived of their national tragedy as a result of the Soviet authorities' discriminatory treatment of the Jews' wartime experience. The Jews' 'ex-centric' position in the Soviet Union goes in tandem with their symbolic status in another intellectual territory, which may have also nourished Makine's thinking on the subject and which is French postwar philosophy. As a consequence of the Holocaust, which is generally considered the 'caesura that so brutally interrupted the history of the West',¹⁸² in the writings of postwar French thinkers the Jews have been both the locus of a now uncanny (Sartre, Girard) and now venerated (Lyotard, Kristeva) alterity, and an emblem of a memory that is threatened precisely by the intensified effort at remembering (Lyotard). While it is difficult to ascertain to what extent the marginalisation of the Jews by Soviet politicians and historians, and/or their elevation by Western discourse to the role of the postmodern Other have determined Makine's decision to commemorate the Soviet Jews' wartime suffering and heroism, it is plain that the author's attempt to create a literary memorial to Jewish fighters and Holocaust victims has been undermined by the imprint that the ideologically correct Soviet-time representations of the Jews have left on his imagination. Effectively, the depiction of Jews in *Confession*, *Requiem* and *La Musique* has been enlisted, like in the case of war heroes, war invalids and, as we will see, Leningraders under siege, in the service of a pro-Russian or even a pro-Soviet political agenda. For, despite Makine's apparent anti-totalising ambitions in relation to Soviet history, instead of protecting the interests of its 'losers', his work, as evidenced by the likening of the Jew to the Christ-bearing ogre, usurps their suffering in order to glorify the allegedly selfless sacrifice the USSR laid at the feet of a beleaguered, helpless and devastated Europe.

182 Milchman and Rosenberg, 'The Unlearned Lessons of the Holocaust', p. 177.

The *Blokadnik*: A Sainly Prostitute or a Heroic Defender of Leningrad?

Everyone who survived the blockade had a guardian angel.

APHORISM



Introduction

[U]ne ville dont Hitler voulait faire un vaste désert. Deux ans et demi de siège, plus d'un million de victimes, c'est-à-dire la disparition, chaque jour, d'une petite ville. Des hivers très rudes, la mort à l'affût dans les labyrinthes noirs des rues, une mégapole de glace sans pain, sans feu, sans transports. Des appartements peuplés de cadavres. Des bombardements incessants. Et les théâtres qui continuaient à montrer des spectacles, des gens qui y viennent après quatorze heures de travail dans des usines d'armement ...

[[A] city that Hitler planned to turn into a vast desert. Two and a half years of siege, more than a million victims, which is to say a small township wiped out every day. Bitterly harsh winters, death lying in wait in the dark labyrinths of the streets, an ice megalopolis without bread, without heat, without transport. Flats populated by corpses. Incessant bombing. And theatres continuing to put on performances, people going to them after working fourteen hours in arms factories ...]

VHI, 114

Echoing the usual litany of atrocities associated with the blockade of Leningrad, this is how in *L'Homme inconnu* Makine summarises what has been considered the deadliest siege of modern Europe.¹ The *blokadniki* and

¹ David M. Glanz, *The Battle for Leningrad 1941–44* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002), p. 470; Harrison Salisbury, *The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad* (London: Martin Secker and

blokadnitsy,² as the men and women living in the encircled city are known in Russia, had to endure not only continuous shelling and air raids, but also the collapse of basic infrastructure and services. For some part of the siege there was no electricity, gas, heating, running water, sewage or public transport, while during the deadly winter of 1941–1942 the temperature dropped down to -40°C . To make things worse, food supplies were totally inadequate, which meant that the daily ration of bread at some point fell to as little as one hundred and twenty-five grams per day. Additionally, however astonishing this may be, political repression was unrelenting during the siege; the knock on the door in the middle of the night, the omnipresence of secret police informers, the arrests, the *gulag* and the executions continued to be the staple of Leningraders' day-to-day existence. As well as the state's criminal and immoral policy towards the body politic, siege survivors have recorded numerous instances of gruesome crime, such as theft, human cadaver trading, corpse-eating or even murder for cannibalism.³ Such details were, however, absent from the official representation of the blockade, which, already concocted during the war and maintained until *perestroika*, transformed a terrible human tragedy into a heroic tale of a morally impeccable community fighting on the 'city front'.⁴ And, while it is unquestionable that between 1941 and 1944 many Leningraders worked in the war industry or joined the civil defence, with most men being away at the front, the 'city of Lenin' was inhabited mainly by women, children and the elderly who, dying by the hundreds, were predominantly focused on their own and their loved ones' survival.

Concentrating on *Confession*, where it is through Faya Moysseyevna's story that the blockade is narrated, and *L'Homme inconnu*, which traces the siege-time fortunes of a couple of opera singers, in this book's final chapter I will consider Makine's novelistic representation of the German encirclement of Leningrad, which, having lasted eight hundred and seventy two days and having claimed around one million lives of the city's two and a half million inhabitants,⁵ is regarded as one the most dramatic episodes of not only the Great Fatherland

Warburg Limited, 1969), p. vii; W. Bruce Lincoln, *Sunlight at Midnight: St. Petersburg and the Rise of Modern Russia* (Oxford: The Perseus Press, 2001), p. 290.

- 2 Throughout the present chapter I will be using the term '*blokadnitsy*', although the masculine term '*blokadniki*' is more frequent. Yet, given that wartime Leningrad was the city of women, I find '*blokadnitsy*' more appropriate, though not ideal.
- 3 Constantine Krypton, 'The Siege of Leningrad', *Russian Review*, 13.4 (October 1954), 255–65 (pp. 262–63).
- 4 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 11.
- 5 Only thirty-two thousand lives were lost due to the shelling of the city by the Germans. The rest is attributed to starvation and starvation-related illnesses. While conservative postwar

War but also World War II. My ambition is to examine the two novels' correspondence to, on the one hand, the officially-concocted myth of the heroic city and, on the other, the unvarnished narratives that have been emerging since *perestroika*. Testing Makine's portrait of the *blokadnitsy* against the historians' and survivors' accounts, I will demonstrate that while *Confession* still offers a rather frank and nuanced image of the blockade by, for example, dealing with the grisly fact of cannibalism, *L'Homme inconnu* is largely concomitant with the heavily romanticised, sanitised and heroised version of the encirclement promulgated in Soviet times. This means that rather than construing the siege as an unimaginable ordeal of the civilian population, abandoned by the Soviet authorities and relentlessly tormented by the enemy, Makine's eleventh novel gradually shifts focus from cold and hunger to guns and trenches, as those caught up inside the German ring metamorphose from dystrophic women and men obsessed with food into valiant soldiers. Consequently, my analysis of the two works of fiction, which both explicitly commit themselves to a revisionist approach to history, will once again lay bare the tension between the post-modern poetics of Makine's oeuvre and the image of the blockade it offers. By disturbingly coinciding with the state-sponsored myth of the siege, this image, I will argue, testifies to the Franco-Russian author's both nostalgia for the wartime élan, which in the Soviet case is perhaps best exemplified by the Leningraders' plight, and political agenda consisting in glorifying Russia's role in the war and reinventing the Russians themselves as not only heroic but also inherently kind, generous, righteous and altruistic people.

Structured around three closely interconnected themes, which are the Leningraders' siege-time conduct, the role of culture during the blockade, and the dichotomies city/front and civilians/soldiers, my discussion will begin with the examination of the moral posture of *blokadnitsy* whom Makine represents mostly as steadfast, selfless, patriotic and serene in the face of their terrible predicament. Although in *Confession* and, to a lesser extent, *L'Homme inconnu* Makine does address corpse-eating, theft and prostitution, he either justifies or trivialises these uncomfortable issues, while abstaining from invoking problems such as the deterioration of interhuman relationships, copiously recorded by survivors. Likewise, while keeping silent over the political violence

estimates give the number of six hundred and seventy thousand dead, more recently a figure approximating one million or even one and a quarter million has been suggested. See, for example, John Barber, 'Introduction', in *Life and Death in Besieged Leningrad: 1941–44*, ed. by John Barber and Andrei Dzeniskevich (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 1–12 (p. 10). See also Krypton, p. 255.

that finds reflection in both private testimonies and the recently-opened NKVD records,⁶ Makine is far from condemning the authorities' ineptness, exemplified by Stalin's much-criticised refusal to declare Leningrad an open city,⁷ by the evacuation of the children into the path of the attacking Germans,⁸ or by the delay in beginning the food rationing.⁹ Finally, my analysis will disclose the writer's silence over some Leningraders' hopes for a German victory or at least for the city to be surrendered, as well as over the general frustration and disdain for the Soviet system.¹⁰ Instead, Makine highlights *blokadnitsy*'s unwaning love for the motherland and loyalty to the regime. Sustaining yet another myth, which is that of the Leningraders' efforts at preserving their self-dignity by maintaining the city's culture alive, *L'Homme inconnu* emphasises the primordial role of arts during the siege. And, although there is certainly much truth in the portrayal of cultural activities as essential to the war effort, the novel's musical intertexts — *The Three Musketeers* or *The Internationale* — serve Makine chiefly to close the gap between artists and fighters. In this way, the author, I will contend, tacitly endorses the propagandist image of Leningrad as a 'city front' and of the starving civilians as heroic fighters, an image that Makine apparently dismisses by populating *L'Homme inconnu* and Faya's story in *Confession* mainly with women, children and the elderly. Rather than undermining the official epic of the siege, Makine, as I demonstrate in the chapter's final section, largely sustains it, offering a progressively idealised portrait of the *blokadnitsy* and placing emphasis on the armed struggle to the neglect of the plight of civilians. Hence, just as he does when addressing the war's other aspects, with his representation of encircled Leningrad Makine reminds his Western audience of Soviet wartime valour and martyrdom, while additionally clearing his beleaguered compatriots of any transgressions they may have committed in the incredibly trying circumstances imposed on them by the siege.

6 See, for example, Irina Sandomirskaya's reading of Lidya Ginzburg's writings which reveal the presence of 'hundreds of thousands of secret informers and denouncers'. Irina Sandomirskaya, 'A Politeia in Besiegement: Lidiia Ginzburg on the Siege of Leningrad as a Political Paradigm', *Slavic Review*, 69.2 (Summer 2010), 306–26 (p. 311). Sandomirskaya also refers to Richard Bidlack's and Nikita A. Lomagin's book *The Leningrad Blockade, 1941–1944: A New Documentary History from the Soviet Archives*, trans. by Marian Schwartz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 78–183 and pp. 329–67.

7 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 4.

8 *Ibidem*, p. 47.

9 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 69.

10 Richard Bidlack, 'Political Loyalties in Leningrad during the "Great Patriotic War"', in *Russian and Soviet History*, ed. by Usitalo and Whisenhunt, pp. 218–20.

Taking the Piss out of the Blockade

In both *Confession* and *L'Homme inconnu* the memories of besieged Leningrad resurface in reaction to Russia's abrupt transformation from communism to liberal democracy and market economy, which, as already shown in this book, Makine conceives of as an unwelcome development. The reforms undertaken by Gorbachev and the ensuing *perekhod* (transition) are systematically blamed by the author for having a detrimental effect on the Russians' communality, appreciation of high culture (*intelligentnost*) and, most importantly, respect for their country's wartime past. Needless to say, Makine also deplores the correlated rise of frenzied materialism, individualism and selfishness, which have considerably worsened the position of those most vulnerable such as the elderly or children, including orphans.¹¹

For the narrator of *Confession*, Faya's story is thus a means of keeping alive the legacy of the siege, which, although finally officially acknowledged with a marble plaque the heroine has been indefatigably campaigning for, is beginning to wane in popular memory. Preoccupied by other concerns, and in particular by the Afghan conflict, people no longer care for the *blokadnitsy*'s ordeal: 'Tout le monde se fiche maintenant de nos vieilles histoires ...' ['No one gives a fig for our old stories these days ...'] (*CFDD*, 137) The neglect is even more profound in the Russia portrayed by *L'Homme inconnu*, a novel set at the beginning of the new millennium and depicting Makine's homeland from the perspective of a Paris-based Russian writer who is consumed by nostalgia for his Soviet youth. Arriving in Saint Petersburg on the tercentenary of the foundation of the city on the Neva, Ivan Shutov witnesses the rewriting of Russia's past in the streets, on television and in a plethora of pseudo-historical publications. The carnivalesque procession that he comes across offers what may be seen as a truly postmodern, for synchronic and playful, take on Russian history: a copy of the cruiser *Aurora*, which signalled the beginning of the assault on the Winter Palace during the October Revolution, is surrounded by several (including one female) Peter the Great lookalikes, hussars, Brazilian dancers, women wearing wigs and crinolines, and impersonators of Stalin, Lenin, Brezhnev or Nicholas II. Like a medieval carnival that featured the dethronement of the king, this savagely cacophonous dramatisation of Russia's past culminates in

11 In *Jacques Dorme* Makine epitomises the *perekhod* with the image of a woman prostituting a young girl, and in *Une femme aimée* he has Oleg's girlfriend Lessya support orphans who have been abandoned by the postcommunist state. For an analysis of cultural representations of the situation of the elderly in contemporary Russian culture, see Helena Duffy, 'Grandmothers and Uncles'.

a symbolic de-crowning of the city's mayor (his Gucci tie is cut off). As Shutov realises when watching a woman explain to her twelve-year old son about the cruiser *Aurora*, the stupefying parade he is watching is aimed at not only tourists, but also young Russians who have not been as thoroughly steeped in their homeland's history as had been his own generation, raised at the time when, in Alexis Peri's words, '[h]istory [...] was "a mighty weapon, forged and honed in the past for the great battles of the present and the future".'¹²

Combined with a populist drive, a similarly cavalier attitude towards historical accuracy marks recent publications. Their titles alone — *Secrets of Kremlin; Stalin, Between God and Devil; Nicholas II, the Innocence of a Martyr; The Occult Forces Behind the Revolution* — convey these works' sensationalist character, and hint at their publisher's interest in making profit rather than doing history justice. This presumption is soon confirmed when the publisher himself starts parading his disregard for historical truth before shamelessly admitting to having manipulated historical data in order to maximise his profits: 'La vérité, les historiens la réécrivent chaque jour. Nous, ce qui nous intéresse c'est de proposer la vérité qui pousse le lecteur à sortir son porte-monnaie.' ['Historians rewrite the truth every day. What interests us is the truth that gets the reader to reach for his [*sic*] wallet.'] (VHI, 95) This disregard for historical truth goes hand in hand, states Shutov, with his compatriots' wish to reconnect contemporary Russia to its prerevolutionary tradition. Emblematised by the renaming of Leningrad, this tendency has also been spotted by Kirschenbaum, who observes that both young people and the war generation were 'capable of fanciful visions of the erstwhile capital.'¹³ As for Shutov, he makes a sarcastic remark about people's desire to erase from their memory 'les décennies qui [...] avaient sépar[é] [la Russie] de son destin' ['the decades that came between [Russia] and her destiny'] and to imagine the past as 'un beau fleuve pollué par la boue de massacres, d'esclavage intellectuel, de peurs.' ['a beautiful river polluted by the sludge of massacres, intellectual slavery, fear.'] (VHI, 103) The protagonist's comment finds reflection in Svetlana Boym's proposition that the communist period is often seen as 'a brief episode in the history of the Russian empire' and the Soviet Union as 'a "Russophobic" state governed by non-Russians (frequently Jews or "Caucasians"), which led to Russia's destruction.'¹⁴ Sporting a T-shirt and jeans, and sipping beer in front of a gigantic TV screen on which commercials alternate with Western-imported

12 Peri, p. 106.

13 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 276.

14 Svetlana Boym, 'From the Russian Soul to Post-Communist Nostalgia', *Representations*, 49 (Winter 1995), 133–66 (p. 145).

soap operas, the young publisher indeed behaves, notes Shutov, as if the communist era had never happened, or as if it had been a fleeting parenthesis in Russia's otherwise glorious trajectory. This is a sign that history, as Shutov concludes sardonically, is resuming its course: 'la Russie [...] retrouve le chemin magistral de son destin' ['Russia [is] returning to the brilliant high road of her destiny'] (VHI, 105). The need to forget communism also manifests itself in the indifference of passersby towards a former dissident artist singing about camps and prisons, or in the youths' disrespect for the eternal flame burning in the Field of Mars. Although the monument officially commemorates the heroes of the October Revolution, it is linked to the memory of the siege, as it is from here that in 1957 the flame was carried to Piskarevskoye Cemetery.¹⁵ By urinating on the Monument to Revolutionary Fighters, the men therefore not only violate the memory of the originating myth of the Soviet Union; they also display their disrespect for the myth that retroactively legitimated the foundation and existence of the first communist state and, for several decades, consolidated the nation in the belief in its military and economic might as well as its superiority over the imperialist West.

The Russians' disregard for their wartime past, including the blockade, can be ultimately inferred from the tragic situation of Volsky. The singer spent the first winter of the siege working at the Leningrad State Theatre of Musical Comedy thus raising the Leningraders' morale. Then, by singing for the troops, including a concert he gave under enemy fire, he did the same for the soldiers. However, Volsky's wartime efforts, both in Leningrad and *en route* to capture Berlin, as well as his postwar work with disabled orphans, elicit little respect or interest from the country's new masters. Shutov's arrival in Saint Petersburg coincides with the old man's eviction from his *kommunalka* that some New Russians are having converted into a luxurious, albeit (naturally) tasteless flat. In this context, for Shutov the return to Leningrad's erstwhile name encapsulates his compatriots' indifference towards or even disrespect for their parents' and grandparents' wartime sacrifices, a position that reflects the feelings of many actual Leningraders, who in 1991 vociferously opposed the restoration of 'Saint Petersburg'. As one person wrote in a letter to *Leningradskaya pravda*,

15 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 202. Tumarkin believes that this gesture meant to signify that '[t]he revolutionary martyrs had conveyed their fighting spirit to the next generation of Leningraders, who in turn had defended their city during the war and were now passing on their greatness of soul to future generations.' Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 126.

the change of the city's name was a 'blasphemous insult to the memory of those who fell at the walls of the city during the Great Fatherland War'.¹⁶

The *Homo Sacer*: Steadfastness, Solidarity, Sacrifice, *Sostradanie* and Serenity¹⁷

It is thus to both revive the memory of the siege and dispel the state-fabricated version of the blockade as the Leningraders' heroic struggle against the enemy that the narrators of *Confession* and *L'Homme inconnu* relate the stories of Faya Moysseyevna, Volsky and Volsky's sweetheart, Mila. One way of opposing the official epic is to concentrate on civilians and their daily struggle for survival, which Makine does by populating the two novels with women, children and the elderly, and by foregrounding the imagination-defying conditions the *blokadnitsy* had to endure. And so *Confession* features three generations of women: Faya, her grandmother and their young and attractive neighbour, Svetlana, who may have questionable mores but who fosters Faya after cold and hunger claim the life of the girl's only relative. Likewise, although *L'Homme inconnu* mentions people working around the clock in munitions factories and shows Volsky being involved in civil defence (he keeps vigil on rooftops and extinguishes incendiary bombs in buckets of sand), the novel features mainly civilians. The non-military character of the siege is further communicated by the novel's title that, by replacing 'unknown soldier' with 'unknown man', travesties the expression found on anonymous combatants' tombs. Before returning to the question of whether *L'Homme inconnu* indeed endorses the image of Leningraders as helpless victims of the German encirclement emerging out of personal accounts written during *perestroika* and thereafter, I will turn my attention to the moral posture of the two novels' protagonists. I will firstly focus on Volsky's *Bildung* as a result of his experience of the blockade and the front, and then examine various manifestations of self-sacrifice and heroism

16 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 271.

17 The meaning of '*sostradanie*', which roughly translates into English as 'compassion', has been defined by Ana Gladkova as 'the awareness of the very bad condition and the consequent very bad feeling of another person'. Gladkova adds that *sostradanie* implies sharing another person's negative emotional state, and 'the desire to do something good to another person and a positive attitude towards that person'. Finally, *sostradanie* is what we feel towards orphans, single mothers and old people. Ana Gladkova, '*Socuvstvие and sostradanie*: A Semantic Study of Two Russian Emotions. The Natural Semantic Metalanguage Approach', *Revue de linguistique et de didactique des langues*, 32 (2005) <<http://lidil.revues.org/93#text>>.

found in the two works of fiction. Finally, I will be giving some thought to the characters of Mila and Svetlana, who both prostitute themselves during the siege. A comparison between the two women's representation in novels separated by a seventeen-year gap will allow me to draw some conclusions about Makine's evolving depiction of the blockade.

As for many Makinean protagonists who are radically metamorphosed by the war, for the eponymous character of *L'Homme inconnu* living in German-encircled Leningrad and then fighting on the Eastern Front constitute a rite of passage that turns him into a quintessential Russian/Soviet man, as imagined by Makine.¹⁸ It is impossible not to notice that Volsky's transmogrification from a budding opera singer and aspiring member of the bourgeoisie in Russia's proudest and most cultured city, as the novel defines Leningrad, into an anti-individualistic and anti-materialistic Soviet citizen echoes that of Berg analysed by the previous chapter. But, whereas the Jewish pianist's conversion is enforced by the circumstances (the purges), Volsky's is only conditioned by the war; then, despite having a chance to re-establish his career, the protagonist willingly abandons his privileged position and instead becomes a social worker helping those most disadvantaged. Significantly, Makine opens Volsky's story with a scene that encapsulates bourgeois existence, which, despite the Bolsheviks' and then Stalin's efforts, evidently continued up until the war's outbreak and then, as we will see later, resumed after the Victory. The scene in question is set on 21st June 1941 in Leningrad's popular 'Café du Nord' where, over a cup of hot chocolate, Volsky, a provincial with excellent prospects for a musical career, strikes up an acquaintance with a pretty middle-class woman. In the Soviet context, the scene's setting is highly significant, since cafés, salons and cabarets were what the Bolsheviks tried to abolish along with private life and petit-bourgeois homeliness.¹⁹ To a café, explains Boym, a Soviet citizen should prefer the swimming pool, the Workers' Club or the Artists' Labour Collective, as the café 'is a place for conversation, not for conversion, a place for minor theatrical revolts, not for revolutions.'²⁰ Bathed in the aura of playfulness and subtle eroticism, the scene of Volsky's meeting with Mila expresses the idea of *poshlost*, a culturally untranslatable Russian term which, importantly, derives from *poshlo* — something that has happened — and which for Vladimir Nabokov combined artistic triviality and

18 Cf. Boym, 'From the Russian Soul to Post-Communist Nostalgia', p. 144.

19 Boym, *Common Places*, p. 126.

20 *Ibidem*, pp. 125–26.

spiritual deficiency.²¹ Uniting 'vulgarity, sexual promiscuity, and lack of spirituality', *poshlost*, in Boym's view, is opposed to spiritual life, self-sacrifice and *sobornost*.²² Fittingly, this sexually-charged episode contrasts with Volsky's chaste relationship with Mila during the siege, the couple's only physical contact being a kiss they enjoy as actors on stage. Another interesting detail of the Café du Nord scene, is the trace of cream left by a pastry on Mila's upper lip, which, looking like a moustache, simultaneously arouses and amuses Volsky. This detail connotes transvestism and, by extension, prerevolutionary decadence, free spirit and light-heartedness that marked exchanges in intellectual and artistic circles before the Bolsheviks and then Stalin imposed on the Soviet people the categories of austerity, chastity and seriousness.²³ The reference of cream pastries also resonates with the echo of Marelst's inculcating prewar memories of eating cream cakes while many were starving to death. As in *Requiem*, where the protagonist's culinary self-indulgence is associated with social injustice and the ruling elite's depravity, here the cream cake and the hot chocolate consumed on the eve of the war stand in direct opposition to the austerity, equality and solidarity brought on by the war.

Endowed with the evocative power of the Proustian madeleine, during the siege the memory of the taste of hot chocolate consumed at the Café du Nord will often mentally transport Volsky to his prewar life, yet, unlike the protagonist of *A la recherche du temps perdu* who cherishes the rare opportunities to be reconnected to his past, Makine's hero is immune to nostalgia and grows increasingly disdainful towards his former existence and self. In this sense, he has much in common with Berg who, as evidenced by his reaction to a piano or to the name of Salzburg on a signpost, feels growingly proud of his emotional detachment from this past. Also, like Berg's, Volsky's transmutation into an archetypal Makinean protagonist is figured as a symbolic death followed by a resurrection, before being modelled on the child's passage through the ego-founding mirror stage. The opera singer's 'rebirth' takes place at the beginning of the siege when he finds surrogate parents in his elderly neighbours.

21 Svetlana Boym, 'The Poetics of Banality: Tat'iana Tolstoia, Lana Gogoberidze, and Larissa Zvezdochetova', in *Fruits of Her Plume: Essays on Contemporary Russian Women's Culture*, ed. by Helena Goscilo (New York: M. E. Sharp, 1993), pp. 59–84, p. 60.

22 *Ibidem*, p. 41.

23 Keith Booker and Dubravka Juraga oppose the Stalinist 1930s with their rigid, humourless and authoritarian practices to the carnivalesque decade that preceded them and that was characterised by 'explosive revolutionary energy'. M. Keith Booker and Dubravka Juraga, *Bakhtin, Stalin and Modern Russian Fiction: Carnival, Dialogism and History* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), pp. 2–3. This is also how in *Olga Abréline* Makine portrays the artistic avant-garde of the prerevolutionary and revolutionary years.

Weakened by cold and hunger, the couple no longer get out of bed and solicit Volsky's help by plucking the strings of a violin.²⁴ After the old man's death, the protagonist faints in the couple's bedroom and then comes to in the widow's arms, thus briefly occupying the ambiguous position of an older woman's child and lover. This is when Volsky learns of his neighbours' selflessness: both the wife and the husband have been saving half of the already extremely frugal ration of bread so that, in case one of them dies, the other one will be able to survive a little longer. The old woman, however, gives another proof of her generosity when, after her husband's death, she shares the food with Volsky and thus saves his life.

If this scene procures Volsky a new lineage and foregrounds his newly acquired altruism, the one staging his elderly neighbour's funeral testifies to the artist's renunciation of his ambition to climb the social ladder and join the country's cultural elite. Expressing the horrors which Leningraders lived through during the encirclement and which were emblematised by the ironic use of children's sleds to transport dead bodies,²⁵ the scene shows Volsky and another woman each pulling a corpse to the cemetery. Even before realising that the woman is Mila, the protagonist offers to help her pull her load and then, when a bomb explodes nearby, shields her with his own body. Mila's use of a painting as a support for her mother's corpse and the couple's subsequent use of sheet music to light a fire, symbolise the devaluation of high culture and prewar — that is bourgeois — values, as well as the couple's disavowal of their artistic ambitions in the face of the unravelling human tragedy. If the couple's gesture is reminiscent of Marelst's separation from his privileged background, symbolised by his use of pages covered with his youthful poems to roll cigarettes, the symmetry between Volsky and Mila when they each transport a body to the cemetery echoes that between Marelst and Pavel, each carrying a wounded soldier. Read in this intratextual context, the scene suggests both the couple's renunciation of their narcissistically-grounded hopes for self-realisation and gaining recognition as artists, and the potential of the

24 Interestingly, like Berg's parents, the couple possess a violin.

25 The image of people transporting corpses on children's sleds features prominently in, among others, Harrison Sallisbury's 1969 seminal book on the Leningrad siege. The author mentions, for example, the poet Olga Berggolts who thus transported her husband's body to the cemetery and includes the famous photograph of a woman pulling a corpse on a child's sled. Salisbury, p. 304. Cf. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 26 and p. 87. Polina Barskova invokes a series of paintings executed by Boris Svetlitsky and depicting Leningraders dragging corpses on children's sleds through vast, empty squares. Polina Barskova, 'The Spectacle of the Besieged City: Repurposing Cultural Memory in Leningrad, 1941–1944', *Slavic Review*, 69.2 (Summer 2010), 327–55 (p. 329).

siege to abolish social differences between a provincial with peasant roots and 'une Lénigradoise de bonne famille.' [a young woman of good family from Leningrad.] (VHI, 123) It needs adding that this is only one of several occasions when Volsky manifests his newly found generosity, kindness and selflessness, as exemplified by his readiness to help the orphaned child he finds wailing against a corpse of a man (father? grandfather?). Even though the protagonist's first impulse may be one of self-preservation, he resolves to share his pitiful portion of bread with the child.

Rather than an exception, Volsky is meant to be representative of *blokadnitsy*, whose admirable behaviour Makine also illustrates with Mila's self-sacrifice for the sake of the children she has spontaneously fostered. Before returning to the heroine's story in the chapter's next section, I will now mention some of the other instances of generosity found in Makine's eleventh novel. Realising his death to be imminent, one of the orphans Mila looks after concedes his portion of bread to his foster siblings. Likewise, the director of the Theatre of Musical Comedy shares his meagre meal with the couple of newly arrived actors. Among other high-minded Leningraders featured in the novel is an actress who, having been fatally injured in an air-raid, uses her last words to convey instructions to her successor, or the actor who comes on stage despite having just learnt of the death of his wife and child during their evacuation. The novel also mentions anonymous Leningraders working around the clock in munitions factories, and stresses these workers' patriotism and self-sacrifice, although in reality people often engaged in physical labour because it meant higher food rations.²⁶ The protagonist then invokes further cases of altruism: 'Volski avait déjà entendu parler de ceux qui, dans Leningrad assiégée, se laissaient mourir pour sauver un proche, d'habitude une mère se sacrifiant pour ses enfants.' ['Volsky had already heard tell of such people in Leningrad in the siege who let themselves die to save a loved one, generally a mother sacrificing herself for her children.'] (VHI, 133–34)

While testimonial literature is replete with similar examples of self-sacrifice, both Kirschenbaum and James Clapperton stress the formative influence of the myth of steadfastness and heroism upon people's perception of their own conduct.²⁷ Kirschenbaum notes that even though *perestroika* made it possible

26 It is precisely to obtain a greater food ration that the husband of scientist Elena Kochina (false identity) chose to do physical work. Elena Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, trans. by Samuel. C. Ramer (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1990).

27 James Clapperton, 'The Siege of Leningrad and the Ambivalence of the Sacred: Conversations with Survivors' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2006), p. 9. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 179.

to write more openly about the German encirclement, the former *blokadnitsy* continue to idealise their own siege-time behaviour as a way of dealing with the disappointment provoked by the collapse of a system which they knew how to negotiate and which awarded them some privileges.²⁸ Kirschenbaum's and Clapperton's observations are illustrated by the findings of classical scholar, Olga Freidenberg, who, conducting sociological research during the blockade, noted that '[o]rdinary people simply reeked of Soviet heroism, a heroism surprising impersonal. [...] Everything living, everything truthful was inadmissible.'²⁹ Her work being largely free from nostalgia, Freidenberg does not refrain from criticising the *blokadnitsy*'s self-interest or even mutual cruelty, although she mentions two women who, despite suffering from malnutrition and scurvy, carried soup across the whole town to a friend who had had a leg blown off in an air-raid. Then, when one of the women collapsed, the other one took her in, put her in her own bed and warmed her with her own body. The two women's story was, however, as Freidenberg stresses, an exception 'amidst a general moral collapse.'³⁰ Similarly, literary critic Lydia Ginzburg saw the blockade as a circle of egotistic gestures aimed at survival, and besieged Leningrad as a place where people committed 'the strangest cruel and dishonest acts' while being 'singularly obsessed with food'.³¹ The blockade induced indifference to the other's death or suffering, so much so that Ginzburg compares Leningraders to Cain, the fratricidal brother.³² Other testimonials reveal that fathers and teenage boys secretly ate food meant for sick children,³³ and

28 *Ibidem*, pp. 231–63.

29 Cynthia Simmons and Nina Perlina, *Writing the Siege of Leningrad: Women's Diaries, Memoirs, and Documentary Prose* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), p. 73.

30 *Ibidem*, p. 74.

31 Quoted by Emily van Buskirk, 'Recovering the Past for the Future: Guilt, Memory, and Lidiia Ginzburg's *Notes of a Blockade Person*', *Slavic Review*, 69.2 (Summer 2010), 281–305 (p. 281).

32 Sandomirskaia, p. 321.

33 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 60. This was allegedly because men were less resilient when it came to starvation. Cf. Cynthia Simmons, 'Lifting the Siege: Women's Voices on Leningrad (1941–1944)', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 40.1–2 (March–June 1998), 43–65 (p. 46); and Clapperton, 'The Siege of Leningrad and the Ambivalence of the Sacred', pp. 255–56. Kochina records that her husband repeatedly stole food meant for their starving daughter. Kochina, p. 47, p. 51 and p. 74. She also reports the baker's theft of bread (pp. 46–47), an incident in which a teenager snatched a loaf from her as she was returning from the bakery (pp. 55–56) and the inequality of food distribution which meant that while some were starving others were feasting (p. 107). The bakers' habit to cheat customers has also been recorded by Ginzburg. Ginzburg, p. 47.

record the efforts of bakery workers to cheat customers of their bread rations, as well as the diarists' own attempts to take advantage of connections, to acquire ration cards illegally, to steal coupons in order to increase their allotment,³⁴ or to use the cards of dead relatives.³⁵ Also, as a consequence of the appalling living conditions Leningraders had to endure, interpersonal relations deteriorated, as can be seen from Ginzburg's *Story of Pity and Cruelty* that stages two close relatives locked in psychological warfare as they struggle for survival.³⁶ Likewise, diarist Elena Kochina narrates the progressive deterioration of her relationship with her husband, who, driven mad by hunger, became distrustful and even abusive towards his wife.³⁷ Kochina also notes that *blokadnitsy* 'came to know a hunger that degraded and crushed [them], that turned [them] into animals';³⁸ they would be hurling abuses at each other, beating each other up and feeling rage as they were queueing to buy bread.³⁹ Yet another example is provided by the diary of Iura Riabinkin, a sixteen-year old who was not to survive the siege. The teenager admits to stealing bread from his mother and younger sister, and expresses his soon-to-be-realised fear that his family will leave him behind when they are evacuated.⁴⁰ Finally, this is how Ginzburg, whose siege experience is marked, according to Emily Van Buskirk, by 'the brutal emotions of pain, hatred, and resentment',⁴¹ describes the complicated and ambivalence-ridden relationships between family members during the siege:

So painful, so fearful was it to touch one another, that in propinquity, at close quarters, it was hard to distinguish love from hatred — towards

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- 34 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, pp. 60–1. The opera singer Galina Vishnevskaya records that her father, who abandoned her in besieged Leningrad, had stolen provisions from military warehouses while her classmate stole her ration book. Galina Vishnevskaya, *Galina: A Russian Story*, trans. by Guy Daniels (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), pp. 28–9.
 - 35 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 176; Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *A Book of the Blockade*, trans. by Hilda Perham (Leningrad: Raduga Publishers, 1982), p. 106.
 - 36 van Buskirk, p. 290.
 - 37 Kochina, p. 71 and p. 105.
 - 38 *Ibidem*, p. 104.
 - 39 *Ibidem*, p. 49.
 - 40 Riabinkin's diary is included in Adamovich's and Granin's revised edition of their *Book of the Blockade*. Quoted by Kirschenbaum, 'Innocent Victims and Heroic Defenders: Children and the Siege of Leningrad', in *Children and War: A Historical Anthology*, ed. by James Marten (New York: New York University Press, 2002), pp. 283–88 (p. 286).
 - 41 van Buskirk, p. 285.

those one couldn't leave. One couldn't leave — that might offend, wound. And so the nexus was maintained. Every possible relationship — camaraderie, discipleship, friendship and love — fell away like leaves; that one remained in force. Wrung with pity or cursing, people shared their bread. [...] Those who departed from the city abandoned their domestic sacrifices to those left behind. And the inadequacy of the sacrifice too (I survived, that means that I didn't sacrifice enough), and along with the inadequacy, remorse.⁴²

Contrary to the afore-quoted examples and other testimonies that speak of violence among family members,⁴³ as well as of frustration, despair or even insanity brought on by the constant hunger and fear of death,⁴⁴ the *blokadnitsy* cast by *L'Homme inconnu* never complain about their lot and are characterised by the 'stoic heroism' and steadfastness continually emphasised by war-time media.⁴⁵ For instance, notwithstanding her bereavement, Volsky's elderly neighbour remains composed, her face adorned with 'ce sourire d'amertume' ['this grieving smile'] (VHI, 134): 'Ces vieilles mains unies, ce *sourire* de peine sur le visage de la femme, le *calme* de son regard.' ['These old hands joined, this grieving *smile* on the woman's face, the *calm* of her gaze.'] (VHI, 133, emphasis added) The young mother holding a baby, whose gaze Volsky encounters as he comes down from the roof where he was putting out incendiaries, also smiles and so does Mila when she faints at the theatre, or the actor who dies just before he is due to go on stage. A faint smile can be detected even on the face of the dead girl sitting on the edge of a frozen pool of water from which, as Volsky guesses, she tried to draw water before collapsing and freezing to death. As it can be seen, in Makine's depiction of the siege there is no sign of the anger and vexation felt by the *blokadnitsy*. The latter often blamed Stalin and the local authorities for not having prepared the country for the war, for deploying too few

42 Ginzburg, pp. 7–8. Van Buskirk provides her own translation of the passage where we read: 'It was forbidden to leave — but you could insult, wound' rather than 'One couldn't leave — that might offend, wound.' Unable to consult the original text, I offer here both — and admittedly different — translations. van Buskirk, p. 285.

43 Ginzburg's writings describe 'a chain of evil extending from "plates thrown on the floor" to the worst crimes of war.' Likewise, Riabinkin recounts suspicion that his mother is dividing food inequitably and finds a deterioration in her and his own behaviour: 'No matter what the conversation touched upon — there was swearing, shouting [and] hysterics'. van Buskirk, p. 296 and p. 284.

44 For Ginzburg the dystrophic subject balances on the verge of insanity. Sandomirskaia, p. 316.

45 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 177.

troops along the Leningrad front, for not having evacuated civilians in time, for letting thousands starve to death, for sending the cream of Leningrad's youth to the front unprepared and with defective weapons, for keeping people at work at night so that their dependants could not get care, or even, as does Freidenberg, for making people work in conditions resembling serfdom while deliberately poisoning them by giving them vodka instead of bread.⁴⁶ Finally, apart from a passing and veiled remark about the existence of censorship in besieged Leningrad, neither of Makine's two novels evokes the oppressiveness of the state to which the blockade brought little respite and which has been amply documented by historians.⁴⁷ While Freidenberg states that the NKVD and political oppression were no less terrible than cannibalism,⁴⁸ in her analysis of Ginzburg's writings Irina Sandomirskaya speaks of the tremendous expansion of the power of the NKVD, secret control through vigilant surveillance, intimidation, and repression of the city's *vita minima*. The critic adds that in the NKVD's phobic imagination, the dying human biomass is riddled with saboteurs, wreckers, vicious spreaders of panicky rumours, agents provocateurs, spies, and defeatists; it is full of potential rioting and treason.⁴⁹

Leningrad's Saintly Prostitutes

Makine's portrayal of the siege does not, however, entirely eschew its darker side, even if it is only the earlier of the two novels that tackles some of the

46 Simmons and Perlina, p. 75.

47 In her secret blockade diary, Berggolts incessantly pesters against the NKVD and, for fear of the secret police, buries her unofficial journals. She mentions two cases of persecution during the siege: that of her father who was deported from Leningrad only because of his German-sounding name, and that of her partner who was sacked from his job at the radio and, had it not been for his and Berggolts's connections, was nearly sent to the front as a private. Anna Reid states that '[t]error, though particularly severe during the first twelve months of the war, continued throughout. There were large-scale deportations in July and August 1941. These were followed by mini-purges of September and November 1941 and March 1942. By autumn 1942 nearly ten thousand people were arrested for political crimes and acquittal was very rare.' Anna Reid, *Leningrad: Tragedy of a City under Siege, 1941–44* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 304. Nikita Lomagin notes that every month during the blockade the NKVD recruited from several hundred up to a thousand and a half new agents and informers. Nikita A. Lomagin, *V tiskakh goloda: Blokada Leningrada v dokumentakh germanskikh spetssluzhb* (Sankt Petersburg: Evropeiskii dom, 2001), pp. 12–13.

48 O. M. Freidenberg, 'Osada cheloveka', *Minuvshee*, 3 (Paris: Atheneum, 1987), 7–44 (pp. 20–1).

49 Sandomirskaya, p. 316 and p. 317.

blockade's gruesome aspects. As for *L'Homme inconnu*, one of the very few examples of the Leningraders' less-than-ideal conduct is Edward's theft of bread destined for the meal of Mila and the other children in her care. In this case, however, the thief can easily be excused as he is only a child and a very hungry one, too. It is worth adding that Makine's choice to condense vice down to Edward's deed echoes '[Daniil] Granin's choice to make the theft of bread the emblem of desperation and depravity in the besieged city'.⁵⁰ Moreover, this minor episode precipitates and hence partly vindicates Mila's decision to sell her body against food for the orphans, which constitutes the other of the two examples of immoral behaviour found in *L'Homme inconnu*. To stress the fact that Mila's choices were a function of the unimaginable siege-time conditions, Makine shows the swift return of his heroine's prewar self once she is reunited with Volsky. This is communicated with the reappearance of Mila's natural hair colour or the fact that her face, bloated as a result of alcohol abuse and malnutrition during the siege, quickly regains its former expression and beauty. In addition, when living as a prostitute Mila is portrayed to be in some kind of trance or even as being half-mad, a state that she comes out of as soon as she is back with Volsky. Provoked, as the narrator emphasises, not by a single fact but by 'un enchaînement de faits qui, réunis, devinrent, ce jour-là, fatals' ['a whole sequence of events [that], taken together, [...] became fateful' (*VHI*, 190), Mila's becoming a whore concurs with the critical point of the siege, which was the bitterly cold winter of 1941–1942. Symbolically, on that fatal day the young woman falls over and twists her ankle, which prevents her from going out to procure food. When Edward steals the bread and the child nicknamed Mandarin, who is evidently Mila's favourite, announces he will die the same evening, the heroine becomes desperate:

Elle crut même pouvoir traverser la ligne du front et aller demander du pain aux Allemands. Dans son esprit, passa la vision d'un échange: elle apporte à manger aux enfants et puis revient vers les soldats ennemies pour être battue, violentée, tuée, tout cela dans la joie d'une parfaite insignifiance de son corps, de sa vie ...

[She even thought herself capable of crossing the front line to go and ask the Germans for bread. A vision of a trade-off passed through her mind, herself taking food for the children and then returning to the enemy

50 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 243. During the 1970s and 1980s Adamovich and Graniin interviewed some two hundred siege survivors. The first edition of *The Blockade Book* was published in 1979 and then another one, substantially expanded, came out in 1982.

soldiers to be beaten, violated, killed, happy that her own body, her own life were utterly unimportant.]

VHI, 194

Makine thus transforms what may be seen as a symptom of the heroine's degraded morals into an act of utmost self-sacrifice, and inscribes Mila into the tradition of women who in his fiction precariously balance between saintliness and transgression. One of these women is Olga Arbyelina, whose eponymous crime — she has sex with her mortally-ill teenage son so that he may experience physical love before dying — Makine reinterprets as the ultimate expression of maternal love and an act of self-immolation. Another one is the red-haired prostitute of *Fleuve Amour*, who also hovers on the border between the licentious and the maternal, and whose condition is equally rationalised with a series of tragic circumstances. Like the redhead who, having discovered her client's young age, instantly metamorphoses from an uncanny prostitute into a loving maternal figure, once reunited with Volsky, Mila becomes again the innocent young woman she was before the war and is ready to welcome back the orphans. More broadly, Mila's self-sacrifice can be seen as a secularised version of Sonya Marmeladova's story narrated by Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, where the character of the saintly prostitute serves the author to examine the motivation for redemptive sacrifice of chastity.⁵¹ Like Sonya, who is induced into prostitution in order to provide for her stepmother and hungry step-siblings, Mila is motivated by fearless compassion for others⁵² and, convinced that she is acting in the name of a higher justice, transgresses a moral percept.⁵³

Rather differently from the story of Mila, who is clearly an unwilling prostitute, is constructed that of Svetlana in *Confession*. Despite the etymology of the protagonist's Christian name, which, deriving from the Russian noun 'svet', translates into English as 'light', 'shining', 'pure', 'blessed' or 'holy' depending on the context,⁵⁴ the novel offers the young woman no possibility of salvation. This is because Svetlana not only sells her body, but also commits an act

51 Elizabeth Blake, 'Sonya, Silent No More: A Response to the Woman Question in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*', *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 50.2 (Summer 2006), 252–71 (p. 252).

52 Diane Oenning Thompson, 'Problems of the Biblical Word in Dostoyevsky's Poetics', in *Dostoyevsky and the Christian Tradition*, ed. by George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 69–99 (p. 73).

53 Blake, pp. 252–53.

54 Dorothy Astoria, *The Name Book* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997), p. 270.

of cannibalism, which, as we will see, Makine evidently considers beyond all redemption. Before I examine in detail the complexity of Svetlana's character, it needs to be stated that no matter how poorly documented it has been, consumption of human flesh in besieged Leningrad was more than rumour.⁵⁵ The relative absence of concrete evidence of cannibalism is to do with its having been a taboo subject until the USSR's breakup, although instances of eating human meat had already been recorded in Soviet history during the famines of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as in some labour camps.⁵⁶ And, even when scholars could finally access archival documents related to the siege, many decided to downplay this grisly detail for fear of overshadowing Leningraders' heroism. Such was the case of Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin who thus explained their editorial decision:

This didn't happen, because if such things did happen, how is it possible to talk and write about the heroism of the blockade, about the exceptional virtue with which [the Leningraders] held out and died in unbearable conditions, about the high cultural level of this city?⁵⁷

Conversely, for Clapperton's respondents the stories of cannibalism only throw the Leningraders' courage and fortitude into sharper relief.⁵⁸ Likewise, Kirschenbaum believes that '[c]annibalism became the gruesome residue of heroism'⁵⁹ and that '[r]evealing incidents of cannibalism provided an opportunity for emphasising that the majority of Leningraders managed to maintain cultural norms in most unimaginable circumstances'.⁶⁰ Having said that, many survivors have preferred to withhold their memories of human flesh

55 Many ate human flesh without realising it. Another category of cannibals were starving Leningraders who cut flesh from corpses that they came across. There is also evidence that cemetery workers and medical staff ate human flesh. Bidlack and Lomagin, pp. 314–15. Cf. James Clapperton, 'The Siege of Leningrad as Sacred Narrative: Conversations with Survivors', *Oral History*, 35 (2007), 49–60. According to recently declassified documents, about two thousand people were arrested for cannibalism during the siege. Simmons and Perlina, p. XVIII.

56 Bidlack and A. Lomagin, p. 314. Makine's *Le Testament* mentions cannibalism in the Volga region during the 1920s.

57 Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, '*Blokadnaia kniga*: Glavy, kotorych v knige ne bylo', *Zvezda* 5–6 (1992), 8–19 (p. 8). Quoted by Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 232.

58 Clapperton, 'The Siege of Leningrad and the Ambivalence of the Sacred', p. 5.

59 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 238.

60 *Idem*.

consumption, to treat it impersonally,⁶¹ or to present it as an extrinsic disaster or as an inescapable fact of life in the starving city.⁶²

Going back to Svetlana, her story is far more greatly nuanced than Mila's. While this complexity undoubtedly reflects more accurately the reality of the siege, it may also be designed to make us suspend our judgement of the young woman's behaviour. Unlike Mila's, Svetlana's moral downfall is shown to be a gradual process and to have begun already before the war, as we infer from the young woman's nickname 'la joyeuse demoiselle' ['merry spinster'] (*CPDD*, 138). *Confession* thus posits cannibalism as a fact of those who were already morally deficient, rather than, as Ana Reid indicates with numerous examples of human flesh consumption, as determined by circumstances (lack of ration cards) or opportunity (access to corpses).⁶³ As for Svetlana's sexual promiscuity, it is, like Mila's, partially excused, since it is thanks to the young woman's generosity that Faya survives after her grandmother's death. Also, Svetlana's choice is portrayed as less dangerous, less strenuous and more lucrative than any of the community-serving activities available to Leningraders. Indeed, when all goes well Svetlana and Faya live in relative opulence, eating more and better quality food than what they could have obtained against ration cards. Justifying the young woman, the narrator puts the following rhetorical question to his readers: 'Devait-elle, comme les autres, s'échiner à l'usine quatorze heures par jour pour une livre de pain? Ou creuser des tranchées antichars? Ou, pis encore, escalader les toits couverts de glace pour éteindre les bombes

61 Kirschenbaum quotes the cultural historian, Dimitrii Likhachev, who, by using passive voice, foregrounds the impersonal and extrinsic character of human flesh consumption: 'Cannibalism had begun! First the corpses were stripped, then sliced to the bone, but there was scarcely any flesh on them; these naked, dissected corpses were a terrible sight'. *Ibidem*, p. 240.

62 *Ibidem*, p. 239.

63 Most of these 'bandits', as cannibals were officially classified since Soviet law did not make provisions for such a crime, were women desperate to feed their starving children, the unemployed, refugees who entered the city illegally, and teenage pupils of trade schools, drafted from the country to be trained as factory hands, that is all those who were not entitled to ration cards. Most of the prosecuted were shot and some were given long gaol sentences. Corpse-eaters were treated more lightly than murderers. In her discussion of cannibalism, Reid mentions a mother who smothered her eighteen-month-old daughter to feed herself and her three other children; a twenty-six-year-old man, laid off from his factory, who murdered and ate his eighteen-year old room-mate; a metalworker (a member of the Party) and his son who killed two women refugees with a hammer and hid their body parts in a shed; an unemployed plumber who killed his wife in order to feed their teenage son and nieces, hiding her remains in the toilets of the Lenenergo workers' hostel. Reid, p. 287.

incendiaires?' ['Should she have worked herself to death fourteen hours a day at the factory for a pound of bread like the others? Or dug anti-tank trenches? Or, worse still, scrambled over ice-covered roofs to put out incendiary bombs?'] (CPDD, 140)

In contrast to her prostitution, Svetlana's cannibalism is depicted as a symptom of an irreversible moral or even mental degradation that can only incite horror, even if the narrator once again rationalises it as a result of a series of unfortunate events: having caught a cold, Svetlana stays bedridden for days, during which time her food supplies run out. Unable to find a client when, still coughing violently and running a temperature, she finally leaves the apartment, the woman consumes human flesh from, we assume, one of the corpses that were easily found in Leningrad's many empty apartments. This means that Makine's protagonist commits only an act of *trupoyedstvo* (corpse-eating), which was considered by Soviet authorities as a lighter offense than *ludoyedstvo* (murder for cannibalism), and was therefore less severely punished. Interestingly, Makine also shows Svetlana's ultimate transgression to be having a dehumanising and maddening effect, or, to approach it from another angle, as depriving the young woman of her feminine and maternal qualities. Before finding its accomplishment in the scene where Faya catches her foster mother eating human meat, Svetlana's transformation starts with her illness. While she herself is described impersonally as 'une ombre émaciée' ['an emaciated shape'] (CPDD, 143), her cough is compared to a dog's barking. Then, in the scene showing Svetlana becoming a cannibal, the heroine is no longer her former elegant and attractive self: wearing a ragged man's padded jacket and a *shapka-ushanka* nonchalantly pushed to the back of her head, Svetlana displays uncharacteristically unladylike manners, chewing noisily and choking. All this confuses Faya about the cannibal's gender identity to the point of her calling the young woman 'uncle',⁶⁴ and frightens her so much that she runs away. The girl's flight from the scene communicates her horror at what she has witnessed, yet at the meta-level of the narrative it also implies the storyteller's disapproval of Svetlana's transgression: '[Faya] sentit qu'elle allait comprendre une chose inouïe, qu'on ne peut pas comprendre, qui n'existe pas, ne peut pas, ne doit pas exister!' ['[Faya] felt she was about to understand something appalling, that could not be understood, that did not exist, should not exist!'] (CPDD, 146, emphasis added) It is noteworthy that this elliptical sentence, which uses a euphemism instead of naming cannibalism directly, echoes not only Adamovich's and Granin's afore-quoted justification of their decision to

64 In Russia children address adults with kinship names (aunt, uncle, grandmother) irrespective of consanguineal relationships.

remain silent about human flesh consumption, but also the general attitude of most Leningraders for whom corpse-eating remained within the sphere of the unthinkable, a behaviour marking the limits of humanity and of culture, 'a descent into barbarism'.⁶⁵

The Siege as Gendered Experience: Heroic Fighters and Holy Blockade Women

In the intratextual context of Makine's oeuvre, whose female characters tend to be maternal and where this maternal quality is invariably positively valorised,⁶⁶ Svetlana's loss of her capacity to act as Faya's surrogate mother makes her unwomanly, which in turn implies the author's negative judgement of her character. However, placed in the context of testimonial writings by those living through the blockade, Svetlana's figurative loss of her gender identity can also be considered characteristic of the detrimental influence on people's bodies of the dehumanising conditions of the siege. *Blokadnitsy's* testimonies contain remarks about the erosion of not only cultural but also gender norms, that is about the homogenising or even androgenising effect of cold and hunger.⁶⁷ Ginzburg, for example, represents the dystrophic subject as pretty much genderless, since *blokadnyi chelovek* (siege person), though grammatically masculine, can be either male or female.⁶⁸ Ginzburg's narrative choice may be grounded in experiences such as that of Kochina who observes that '[w]omen walk around in trousers, men wear large women's kerchiefs on their heads. Everybody looks the same. Leningraders have lost their sex and age.'⁶⁹ Likewise, Ksenya Matus, an oboist with the Leningrad Philharmonic, remembers that in the audience at her concert she could not tell men from women, as men were wearing women's scarves and fur coats.⁷⁰ While another survivor notes that even voices lost their gendered quality,⁷¹ Leon Gouré states

65 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 238.

66 Cf. Charlotte Lemonnier (*Le Testament*), Alexandra (*Jacques Dorme*), the red-haired prostitute (*Fleuve Amour*) or Sasha (*Requiem*).

67 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 183.

68 In *Blockade Diary*, in endnote 4, Alan Myers explains that Ginzburg's remarks regarding the siege person apply to the psychology of both men and women. He adds that '*blokadnyi chelovek*' ought to be understood as analogous to *Homo sovieticus*, that is as transcending gender.

69 Kochina, p. 53. In this passage some of the wording has been changed.

70 Simmons and Perlina, pp. 148–49.

71 Quoted by Kirschenbaum, "The Alienated Body", p. 227.

that during the siege women stopped menstruating.⁷² Finally, for Berggolts, the disappearance of the gendered body is the measure of the degradation caused by the blockade, as illustrated by the poet's description of the women she saw in the public bathhouse in spring 1942: 'The blemished, stretched, rough skin of the women's bodies — no, not even women — they had ceased to resemble women.'⁷³ Logically, the testimonies included in *The Blockade Book* suggest that the return of femininity, physical attractiveness and male desire marked the full recovery from starvation,⁷⁴ a point that, as we will see later, is also implicitly made by *L'Homme inconnu*.

By underscoring the detrimental effect of cold, hunger and lack of basic facilities on those living inside the German 'iron ring',⁷⁵ Makine appears to destabilise the overarching narrative of the siege, which pictured the *blokadnitsy* as 'fighters and survivors rather than victims', and which 'emphasised the threat of German shells and bombs — not the deaths from starvation'.⁷⁶ Since '[s]tarving civilians, much more than so-called heroic defenders on rooftops, stood not only as a potential reproach to the state that lacked the means to feed them, but also as a potential challenge to the notion of heroic, meaningful, willing sacrifice',⁷⁷ instead of '*golod*' (hunger) the authorities used the term 'dystrophy', a euphemism that pathologised the effects of malnutrition on the body and the mind.⁷⁸ As well as accentuating the omnipresent hunger and death by starvation, in his two siege novels Makine places emphasis on the female experience. Like malnutrition, the latter was deliberately obscured by the official parlance in which Leningrad became, in Kirschenbaum's terms, 'the setting for traditional acts of male military heroism in defence of mothers and the motherland'.⁷⁹ In other words, the state-sponsored myth of the blockade highlighted the efforts to supply the city, to withstand German attacks and to break the blockade, whereas in reality much of Leningrad's male population was at the front or evacuated with war industries. Consequently, the city

72 Leon Gouré, *The Siege of Leningrad* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), p. 220.

73 Kirschenbaum, "'The Alienated Body'", p. 229.

74 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 183.

75 Alexander Werth, *Leningrad 1943: Inside a City under Siege* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), p. 104.

76 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 52.

77 *Ibidem*, p. 53.

78 Krypton, p. 256. See also Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 256.

79 Lisa Kirschenbaum, 'Gender, Memory, and National Myths: Ol'ga Berggol'ts and the Siege of Leningrad', *Nationalities Papers*, 28 (2000), 551–64 (p. 552).

was populated predominantly by women,⁸⁰ the elderly and children,⁸¹ the siege thus becoming, as Cynthia Simmons contends, 'a woman's experience.'⁸² 'Wartime effort to mythologise the "Leningrad epic"', writes Kirschenbaum, 'often substituted "heroic defenders" for housewives, and glorious military operations for "unpretentious" efforts to feed the family'.⁸³ This means that in the official wartime accounts of the encirclement women emerged 'as warriors who combined the steadfastness [...] and courage [...] of male soldiers with an indestructible Soviet femininity'.⁸⁴

Even if Makine may be far from endorsing the image of a female munitions worker or the MPVO (local air defence forces) girl that dominated siege-time media,⁸⁵ his novels are suffused with images of maternal women which constituted the most striking element of wartime propaganda.⁸⁶ According to Kirschenbaum, the figure of the mother functioned 'both as [a] national symbol and as the constantly reworked and reimagined nexus between home and nation, between love for the family and devotion to the state.'⁸⁷ Apart from Mila, who fosters sixteen war orphans and is ready for any sacrifice for the sake of these children, *L'Homme inconnu* stages an anonymous mother and baby, whom Volsky passes as he is coming down from the rooftop where he was holding watch. This Madonna-like figure uncannily resembles two war-time posters, both displayed on the streets of besieged Leningrad, one showing a mother holding a dead child in her arms under the caption 'Death to Child Killers', and the other one featuring a mother and child threatened by

80 When speaking to her fellow citizens on the radio Anna Akhmatova addressed 'mothers, wives, and sisters of Leningrad', as if the besieged city were a large extended family. Likewise, Berggolts stretched the concept of heroism in war, imagining the construction of a war memorial that honoured not a soldier but a simple housewife in a headscarf, clutching her purse as she went out for bread under artillery fire. However, Berggolts herself realised that the state was unlikely to commemorate people who 'didn't blow up tanks'. Quoted by Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 33 and p. 79.

81 Kirschenbaum, 'Gender, Memory, and National Myths', p. 553. See also Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 47.

82 Simmons, p. 45. Cf. Darra Goldstein, 'Women under Siege: Leningrad 1941–1942' <http://darragoldstein.com/files/2012/12/Darra_Goldstein_Women.pdf>.

83 Kirschenbaum, 'Gender, Memory, and National Myths', p. 555.

84 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 51.

85 *Ibidem*, p. 52.

86 Kirschenbaum, "'Our City, Our Hearths, Our Families": Local Loyalties and Private Life in Soviet World War II Propaganda', *Slavic Review*, 59.4 (Winter 2000), 825–47 (p. 825).

87 *Idem*. See also Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 50.

a bayonet marked with the swastika.⁸⁸ That the image of mothers was also prominent in siege-related postwar Soviet parlance is evidenced by the monument to the Leningrad dead at the Piskarevskoye Cemetery, which takes the form of an enormous statue to the Motherland, as well as by other memorials that expressed the painful realities of the war in allegorical images of mothers holding dead children in their arms.⁸⁹ According to Kirschenbaum, '[d]uring the war, *Rodina-mat*' [a word which derives from the verb *rodit*, to give birth, and which can mean birthplace both in the narrow and broad sense] emerged as a ubiquitous national symbol that sanctified war as a defence of the family and the state.⁹⁰ Indeed, like the propagandist images of helpless mothers, whose aim was to stir up patriotic feeling, the young woman Volsky encounters on the stairs both vindicates the protagonist's self-sacrifice and renders banal — or even *poshly*, which is an adjective deriving from *poshlost* — his occasional regrets of his pre-war life:

Oui, pour le sourire exsangue de la femme, pour la respiration calme de son enfant, il fallait oublier le jeune homme qui, un soir de juin, buvait son chocolat et se sentait orgueilleusement vainqueur. Depuis le début du blocus, [Volski] n'avait jamais pensé qu'une vie sauvée au prix de sa propre vie pouvait devenir son destin.

[Yes, for this woman's wan smile, for her child's calm breathing, one must forget that young man drinking his hot chocolate on a June evening and feeling proudly triumphant. Since the start of the blockade [Volsky] had never considered that saving a life at the cost of his own might be his destiny.]

VHI, 129–30

If Volsky is thus modelled on a heroic and selfless defender of Leningrad, as proffered by wartime propaganda, Mila, despite her moral lapse, largely fits the ideal of the 'holy blockade woman' emerging from the unvarnished accounts of the siege published during and after *glasnost*, which, their relative candour aside, continued to be nourished by the official Leningrad epic.⁹¹ Like these *perestroika*-time testimonies that speak of the surrogate maternal

88 *Ibidem*, pp. 83–4.

89 *Ibidem*, p. 187.

90 Kirschenbaum, 'Gender, Memory, and National Myths', p. 559.

91 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, pp. 231–63.

care spontaneously provided by women during the blockade,⁹² *L'Homme inconnu* — though not *Confession* — underlies the stability and dependability of motherly love, illustrated with the story of Mila or of women sacrificing themselves for their children. Finally, like the survivors' accounts, Makine's two siege novels oppose the figure of the half-crazed cannibal/mother,⁹³ embodied by Svetlana, to the self-sacrificing woman, incarnated by Mila or by Volsky's elderly neighbour, who are both meant to act as an emblem of Leningraders' persistent virtue.⁹⁴

'All for One and One for All'

Notwithstanding Makine's apparent ambition to concentrate on the sufferings of civilians, *L'Homme inconnu* ends up enshrining the image of the *blokadnitsy* as battle-hardened soldiers and of Leningrad as the 'city-front'. In this section I will argue that it is through their involvement with the State Theatre of Musical Comedy that Mila and Volsky gradually merge with the city's 'heroic defenders', while Leningrad itself becomes one with the front. I will also show that the eponymous protagonist's most vivid war memories are not those of the cold and hunger he knew in the besieged city but those of two major battles: the battle of Leningrad, during which Volsky sang under fire, and the battle of Kursk that constitutes another transformative moment for the opera singer. Additionally, in this section I will demonstrate that *L'Homme inconnu* confirms other propagandist ideas, such as the *blokadnitsy*'s high level of culture, in the sense of both *kulturnost* and *intelligentnost*, and of 'the great blockade brotherhood',⁹⁵ which, coined by Berggolts in relation to the embattled, courageous and united Leningraders, was indeed to become one of the sacred themes in siege testimony.⁹⁶

Before finding work at the theatre Volsky and Mila are in the position of ordinary civilians such as those whom Ginzburg described as dwelling in the

92 *Ibidem*, p. 166.

93 *Ibidem*, p. 242.

94 *Idem*.

95 *Ibidem*, p. 54 and p. 107.

96 One of the survivors interviewed by Clapperton said: 'We helped one another in order to give us faith that victory had to come', while another talks about the absence of racial or class prejudice during the siege. Clapperton, 'The Siege of Leningrad as Sacred Narrative', p. 50 and p. 58.

'peripheral world'⁹⁷ and 'left to get on with [their] self-preservation.'⁹⁸ It is never explained why Volsky serves in the MPVO until the winter of 1941–1942, rather than being subject to immediate mobilisation, or why, if for some reason exempt from the draft, he does not volunteer or is not, as were countless artists and intellectuals, thrown into the hastily organised units of people's militia (*narodnoe opolchenie*).⁹⁹ Correspondingly, Makine leaves us guessing why, unlike most women who were recruited to dig tank traps, build fortifications, extinguish incendiaries or replace men in factories,¹⁰⁰ Mila stays idle during the first few months of the war. One can only speculate that the author thus intended to draw our attention to the situation of the intelligentsia 'in exceptional circumstances',¹⁰¹ represented by the anonymous and archetypal (*summaryi*) N in Ginzburg's *Blockade Diary*. Required by neither war nor military production, Ginzburg's N becomes a 'superfluous' or — depending on the translation — 'unrequested' person:¹⁰² 'Just behind the lines the civilian does not work, or works only in a formal sense [...] because there is nothing for him [*sic*] to produce.'¹⁰³ Having said that, on a historical scale the task of 'saving the dimming flame of life within [one]self' acquires for Ginzburg a heroic dimension as it prevents 'this fighting city [...] from dying'¹⁰⁴ and, by extension, serves the country at war, even if the superfluous/unrequested may not yet realise it themselves and continue to be haunted by a sense of guilt caused by their 'egotistic suffering'.¹⁰⁵ In this context, one can read Mila's and Volsky's eventual professional engagement as the accomplishment of their spiritual journey from individualist members of the bourgeoisie towards true Soviet citizens, a journey similar to that of Alexei Berg who, though admittedly less spontaneously than the two singers, forsakes his despised 'superfluity'. Additionally, by offering their services to the theatre where they join a family-like troupe of artists, Mila and Volsky follow the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian

97 Ginzburg, p. 19.

98 *Ibidem*, p. 93.

99 *Ibidem*, p. 92. Ginzburg adds that, untrained and practically unarmed these recruits were thrown against German forces and, needless to say, most of them perished.

100 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, pp. 42–3.

101 Ginzburg, p. 3.

102 Whereas Alan Myers chooses to translate the Russian term '*neponadobivshiisya chelovek*' as 'superfluous man', Sandomirskaya proposes 'unrequested man' which, unlike Myers' choice, does not produce associations with the literary tradition of the superfluous man (*lishnyi chelovek*). Sandomirskaya, p. 310.

103 Ginzburg, p. 93.

104 *Ibidem*, p. 76.

105 *Ibidem*, p. 94.

tradition where, as Ellen Changes explains, 'salvation is attained by remaining within the community rather than by individual effort',¹⁰⁶ and where the individual's 'superfluity' is mostly negatively evaluated.¹⁰⁷ In reality, however, the couple's declaration of their readiness to be *useful* would have been motivated mainly by the need to obtain food ration cards. That being *useful* can indeed be interpreted here as euphemism for 'surviving', transpires from Ginzburg's comment that in besieged Leningrad only those useful to the system were given a chance to live on, while the weakest and the most vulnerable were condemned, having no place in the new hierarchies based on the individual's utility for the purposes of war.¹⁰⁸

This is, however, where parallels between Makine's and Ginzburg's work end, for, unlike *Blockade Diary* that lays bare the inequity, selfishness and ruthlessness marking life under siege, *L'Homme inconnu* insists on the *blokadnitsy*'s equality, solidarity and generosity. This is especially so if we assume that the State Theatre of Musical Comedy is representative of besieged Leningrad, a reading invited by Makine's own repeated use of theatre as metaphor for life, or by the narrator's statement that '[la] vie [de Volski et Mila] se confondit avec le théâtre.' ['[the] lives [of Volsky and Mila] merged with that of the theatre.'] (*VHI*, 147) Furthermore, many survivors have expressed the encircled city's otherworldliness by comparing it to a 'stage set' or to a 'spectacle', a choice that can be inscribed into the literary tradition known as the Petersburg text¹⁰⁹ where one comes across the motif of the fusion between life and art.¹¹⁰ Writing about the Saint Petersburg carnival, Boym comments upon the Petersburgians' love of artifice and artificiality,¹¹¹ and observers that '[t]he whole city becomes a theatre, with no distinction between audience and stage.'¹¹² In Makine's elev-

106 Chances, p. 112.

107 *Ibidem*, pp. 112–22. Among the exceptions is the eponymous hero of Boris Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago* whose nonconformity is represented as a virtue.

108 See Sandomirskaya, p. 311 and p. 320. Sandomirskaya uses the dystrophic body's self-cannibalisation as a metaphor of the self-destruction of Leningrad where 'useful ones survive at the expense of ordinary citizens.' (p. 315).

109 The Petersburg text, myth or theme refers to a literary tradition initiated by Pushkin but perhaps having roots in oral tradition. Among the texts belonging to the tradition are Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman* and *The Queen of Spades*, Gogol's *Petersburg Tales*, Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* or Andrei Bely's *Petersburg*. See Olga Matich, *Petersburg/Petersburg: Novel and City 1900–1921* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).

110 See Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 164. See also Barskova, p. 328.

111 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 125.

112 *Ibidem*, p. 126.

enth novel the democratic character of the emblematic microcosm which is the State Theatre of Musical Comedy is expressed, firstly, by the lack of a hierarchical division of labour: '[Volski et Mila] aidèrent à installer les décors, donnaient un coup de main aux costumiers, préparaient le repas pour les chanteurs et les musiciens. Et le soir, ils jouaient.' ['[Volsky and Mila] assisted in putting up scenery, gave a helping hand to wardrobe, cooked meals for the singers and musicians. And in the evening they went on stage.'] (*VHI*, 147) Secondly, returning to one of his favourite tropes that is the war's democratising and liberalising effect,¹¹³ Makine emphasises the disappearance of the usual distance separating the audience from the artists, all Leningraders being now united in misery and, potentially, in death. The image of the spectators, who, too weak to applaud, bow to thank the actors, invokes the silent communion between the concentration camp survivor and a mortally-wounded Soviet soldier in *Requiem*, where this communion is symbolised with a cup of rain-water the prisoner offers to his liberator. Likewise, the afore-described scene in *L'Homme inconnu* conveys the Leningraders' gratitude to the artists for acting in an ice-cold and dark theatre where performances are incessantly interrupted by bomb alerts: 'Cette gratitude silencieuse touchait plus que n'importe quelles ovations.' ['This silent gratitude was more touching than any number of ovations.'] (*VHI*, 148)¹¹⁴ It must be noted, however, that such a description of the State Theatre of Musical Comedy goes against some survivors' memories of similar cultural institutions, such as the Marinsky Ballet School, as remembered by Vera Kostrovitskaya. The former ballerina accuses the school director of profiteering and cruelty towards students, and remembers performing to a quasi-empty auditorium for there was no one ready to attend performances in the conditions reigning in the city.¹¹⁵

113 For a more detailed discussion of this motif, see Duffy, 'In Search of Carnavalesque Anomie'.

114 The Leningrad State Theatre of Musical Comedy (*Teatr Muzykalnou Komedii*) was the only remaining theatre in Leningrad and it was filled every night despite cold, hunger, shells and sales of tickets for bread rations (four hundred grams per ticket). Richard Stites, 'Frontline Entertainment', in *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, ed. by Richard Stites (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 126–40 (p. 129).

115 Kostrovitskaya remembers Lidya Tager, the director of the ballet and the wife of the head of provisions for the whole Leningrad front, as rosy-cheeked and always wearing expensive new clothes, all obtained in exchange for food. The woman tantalised the ballerinas, many of whom, weakened by famine and scurvy, could not dance let alone shovel snow (she threatened to take away their ration coupons). Tager also bullied the dancers into abandoning their starving dependants. Kostrovitskaya also describes the tragic death of a

While stressing the importance of culture during the blockade Makine insists upon the egalitarian and socially-engaged character of the siege-time artistic production. Indeed, rather than realising their artistic ambitions or satisfying their hunger for admiration, as it would have done before the war, Volsky's and Mila's work helps, however indirectly at first, the struggle against the enemy. It does so by creating a semblance of a normal existence despite the all but normal living conditions and, consequently, by sustaining the Leningraders' morale.¹¹⁶ Before the two singers' involvement in the defence of Leningrad becomes reality, their contribution to the struggle against the enemy is anticipated by the theatre's repertoire, even if it may seem initially that by choosing a French operetta as *L'Homme inconnu*'s key intertext Makine merely wanted to endow, as he had done in his earlier novels,¹¹⁷ this otherwise Russian story with a French theme and thus better engage his prospective readers. These speculations are confirmed by the narrator who downplays the military connotations of Louis Varney's *Three Musketeers* by suggesting that it was but to provide Leningraders with light entertainment,¹¹⁸ the operetta's sunny setting offering a welcome — albeit ironically cruel — contrast to the freezing cold and thick darkness holding the city in their grip. The choice of a play that is set partly during another siege — the famous siege of La Rochelle (1627–1628) — and has soldiers as its eponymous protagonists does not seem nevertheless to be unintentional, its likely aim being to reduce the distance between the singers and the city's 'heroic defenders'. In addition, the play's main themes, which are the unflinching solidarity of the musketeers and d'Artagnan, and the four main characters' boundless loyalty to the King, in *L'Homme inconnu*

dancer, Petya Korsakov, whom Tager refused to save despite being able to do so. Simmons and Perlina, pp. 47–52.

116 Richard Stites observes that production of culture in wartime Soviet Union 'occurred to a degree undreamed of in other belligerent states'. Apart from the older and infirm artists, everyone was sent to the front to support the soldiers' morale. Stites, 'Frontline Entertainment', p. 127.

117 Cf. *Fleuve Amour* whose intertexts include French novels and French films starring Jean-Paul Belmondo, *Le Testament* that is peppered with references to French culture, or *Jacques Dorme* whose two central protagonists are French and where de Gaulle makes an episodic appearance.

118 Louis Varney is the author of *Les Mousquetaires au couvent* (1880) and not *Les Trois Mousquetaires*. The difference in title and the evident divergence between Varney's play and the operetta described by Makine may result from the Russian adaptation of the piece, as the author himself suggests. For the summary of the operetta, see Adrienne Simpson, *Alice May: Gilbert & Sullivan's First Prima Donna* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 111.

find their equivalent in the actors' infinite mutual support and their patriotism respectively. Indeed, a few pages later the link between Varney's operetta and the defence of Leningrad is confirmed by the fact that, when singing on the battlefield, the artists, who ask to be armed and sent to a fighting unit, call themselves 'Musketeers' and address their guiding officer as 'Captain', thus alluding to d'Artagnan's rank.

Heralded by the novel's French intertext, the theatre company's involvement in the war soon becomes more direct when the actors start performing for the troops and eventually sing under fire during what is presented as the decisive battle for Leningrad. On the day when they are first driven to the barracks the singers realise the extreme proximity of the front, whereby Makine further amalgamates Leningrad's civilian population with the soldiers defending the city, and, consequently, implicitly opposes Ginzburg's own impression of dwelling on 'the periphery of war', separated from the front by 'a different quality of its unfreedom'.¹¹⁹ As if they were rank-and-file soldiers, even before singing on the battlefield the artists working at the State Theatre of Musical Comedy die — be it from cold and hunger or in air raids — almost daily and, when performing under shelling, several of them perish or are wounded. As for the eponymous protagonist himself, the gap between Volsky-the artist and Volsky-the soldier further narrows when the narrator announces that the front could teach him nothing: 'Dans Leningrad assiégé, il avait vécu la mort aussi intimement qu'eût fait *un soldat*.' ['In the siege of Leningrad he had lived with death as intimately as *a soldier* would have done.'] (VHI, 164, emphasis added)

Like the episode where artists sing for the soldiers, Makine's description of the day-to-day activities of the theatre sustains the idea that culture gave Leningraders new strength in the face of brutalising conditions.¹²⁰ It also literally illustrates the wartime saying 'And the muses did not fall silent' ('*A muzyne molchali*'), which occupied the central place in siege mythology, inverting the famous Russian saying 'When shells resound, muses must be silent'.¹²¹ Makine further endorses the official Soviet discourse on the blockade by insisting on the singers' heroism and patriotic zeal, which he does by using language that often uncannily echoes wartime and postwar propaganda. He points out, for instance, that although participation was voluntary, no one refused the call

119 Ginzburg, p. 19.

120 For an account of the battle which seems to have inspired Makine, see Harold B. Segel, 'Drama of Struggle: The Wartime Stage Repertoire', in *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, ed. by Stites, pp. 108–25 (p. 109). Segel speaks of the extraordinary courage of actors performing amidst the nerve-shattering roar of heavy bombardment.

121 Quoted by Clapperton, 'The Siege of Leningrad and the Ambivalence of the Sacred', p. 252.

and then, despite several deaths and injuries among the musicians, the singing lost none of its intensity:

Les chanteurs forcèrent leurs voix, avec une liesse sauvage, avec la joie d'être identifiés par l'ennemi et donc de compter dans ce combat. [...] Le mépris de la mort fit jaillir une violente exultation de leurs corps décharnés. Des larmes brillaient sur leurs cils.

[The singers reinforced their voices with wild exhilaration, glad to be identified by the enemy and therefore counting for something in this fight. [...] Scorn for death caused a fierce exultation to well up in their emaciated bodies. Tears shone upon their eyelashes.]

VHI, 160–61

Furthermore, the novel identifies the *blokadnitsy's* plight with that of the whole nation, just as did Soviet propaganda, thus deliberately denying the Leningraders' initiative and self-reliance, the specificity of the encircled civilians' situation and, by extension, the city's symbolic role as Russia's cultural and intellectual centre that it had enjoyed since its foundation:¹²² '[Les musiciens] étaient peu nombreux sur leur scène de neige tassée, mais les soldats avaient l'impression que *la puissance de tout le pays se soulevait derrière eux*.' ['[The musicians] were few in number on their stage of compacted snow, but it felt to the soldiers as if *the power of the whole country rose behind them*.] (VHI, 158, emphasis added)

Yet, paradoxically, despite echoing the official Soviet parlance, Makine stresses the absence of ardent communists among the singers, disassociating the artists' contribution to the struggle against the Germans from the oppressive state. Instead, by having the artists perform *The Internationale*, he attributes their sense of freedom and agency to the return to the values of the October Revolution,¹²³ a theme also strongly present in the writings of Berggolts, for whom the siege generated an unprecedented (and not to be repeated) sense of liberation.¹²⁴ The anthem of the Left seemed appropriate, the narrator

122 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, pp. 33–4.

123 Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 170.

124 In *February Diary* (1942), Berggolts writes: 'In mire, in gloom, in hunger, in sorrow,/Where death, like a shade, dragged along at our heels,/We were so happy,/Breathed such wild freedom,/That our grandchildren would have envied us'. Quoted by Deming Brown, 'World War II in Soviet Literature', in *The Impact of WWII on the Soviet Union*, ed. by Linz, pp. 243–51 (p. 245).

emphasises, not because at the time it was also the anthem of the USSR,¹²⁵ but because its lyrics 'disaient la vérité difficile à nier' ['spoke of a truth it was difficult to deny'] (VHI, 157). Indeed, the Russian version of *The Internationale* calls 'the world's starving and enslaved' to rise up and join 'the final, the decisive battle', while accentuating the fighters' initiative, self-reliance, solidarity and independence from any authority or masters.¹²⁶ Combined with the fact that the actors sing 'avec une liberté jamais éprouvée' ['with a freedom never before experienced'] (VHI, 161), Makine's description of the battlefield performance fits in with the idea of music as a tool of tacit rebellion against authority running through the author's oeuvre.¹²⁷ It also mirrors the Leningraders' wartime feelings that the blockade had created a possibility of a resurgence of their city's cultural pre-eminence, reaffirming Leningrad's status as 'a symbolic alternative to Moscow' and 'a potential source of alternative visions of the future and alternative identities.'¹²⁸

The City of Culture or the Uncanny City¹²⁹

Even if Makine's decision to cast opera singers as *L'Homme inconnu*'s central characters may have been intended as an attempt to defy the myth of the 'heroic defenders of Leningrad', it supports another idea that is part of the siege mythology, namely that of the Leningraders' high level of culture (*intelligentnost*) and of the key role of arts, and especially of music, in the everyday battle for the city on the Neva. As already mentioned, wartime Soviet

125 In January 1944 *The Internationale* was replaced with a new anthem that made references to Stalin and the USSR's struggle against the Nazis.

126 <<http://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/sounds/lyrics/international.htm#ru>>.

127 Cf. *Confession* where it is with their wild music that Alyosha and Arkady simultaneously revolt against the state-concocted version of the Great Fatherland War and pay tribute to their parents' wartime suffering. Similarly, in *La Fille* young recruits channel into music their frustration at the conditions of the draft and the absurdity of the war in which most of them are to perish. Finally, in *La Musique* Berg's clandestine trips of Moscow to attend a classical concert are a form of rebellion against the draconian punitive measures imposed on him by the state.

128 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 107. Kirschenbaum states that the experience of war raised hopes for the end of collective farms, a large-scale amnesty, a relaxation of censorship, and that these expectations were possibly most palpable in Leningrad (pp. 107–11).

129 'Uncanny city' is a term often used in relation to Saint Petersburg. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 15.

Union knew frantic cultural activity,¹³⁰ while Leningrad itself was certainly living up to its reputation of a major artistic centre.¹³¹ Attending cultural events was one way of preserving human dignity as well as community ties,¹³² and many survivors remember that it was precisely culture — as both art and moral uprightness — that sustained them,¹³³ although there are also some who admit to have had little time for such relatively trivial concerns.¹³⁴ That music was indeed particularly important during the blockade can be inferred from not only survivors' testimonies but also the impressive calendar of concerts and performances.¹³⁵ Also, if one of the most emblematic photographic images of the blockade is that of Dimitri Shostakovich sporting a fireman's helmet and standing astride the rooftop of the Conservatory,¹³⁶ the single most significant artistic expression of the Leningraders' plight is the composer's *Seventh Symphony*, written partly in Leningrad¹³⁷ and, having had its Moscow, New York and London premiere, performed by a makeshift orchestra in the besieged city

130 See Richard M. Stites, 'Holy War and Cold War 1941–1953', in *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 98–103; and *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, ed. by Stites.

131 In *Olga Arbélina* Makine describes the vibrant, colourful and highly developed artistic life of Petrograd, as Leningrad was called at the time. See also Chapter 9, 'St. Petersburg, the Cosmopolitan Province' in Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, pp. 121–72. Boym states that 'culture has become a Petersburgian "natural resource"' (p. 125).

132 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 63.

133 Granin recalls that 'people fell back on poetry, diaries, music, scholarly endeavours. Culture gave them new strength, supported them physically'. Quoted by Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 241. See also the interview with Ksenya Matus in Simmons and Perlina, pp. 147–48, and Kostrovitskaya's diary in the same collection. Kostrovitskaya recalls the presence of a group of sailor-musicians living across the courtyard from her. Before they all died, every day, despite the bombing, cold (the sailors did not have a *burzhuika*) and hunger, the musicians sounded their brass instruments: 'During these hours it seemed that one need only to gather one's strength, endure a week or two, and all would be like it was before the war. Music helped a person then.' (p. 48).

134 Clapperton, 'The Siege of Leningrad and the Ambivalence of the Sacred', p. 254.

135 Andrei Nikolaevich Kriukov, *Muzyka v dni blokady* (Sankt Peterburg: Kompozitor, 2002).

136 Clapperton, 'The Siege of Leningrad and the Ambivalence of the Sacred', p. 254. In reality, the photograph was staged quite a distance from Leningrad, in Kuibyshev, where the composer was rehearsing the symphony. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 146.

137 The composer was evacuated while writing his *Seventh Symphony*. It also needs to be noted that Shostakovich conceived his work in response to the purges of the late 1930s and privately he presented his composition as an indictment on both Stalin and Hitler. Alexandra Harrington, *The Poetry of Anna Akhmatova: Living in Different Mirrors* (London: Anthem Press, 2006), p. 242.

on 9 September 1942.¹³⁸ It goes without saying that Shostakovich's composition was played in Leningrad for propaganda purposes:¹³⁹ the score was flown into the city breaking through the encirclement, the performance was broadcast on radio and Soviet batteries had bombed German units so that the concert would not be interrupted by air raids. Like Shostakovich, Anna Akhmatova, another Leningrad artist severely criticised in the 1930s, was brought back into the fold during the war,¹⁴⁰ so that she might bring her fellow citizens' plight to national and international attention. And so in the official wartime discourse Leningrad became a symbol of civilisation withstanding barbarism,¹⁴¹ especially as explicit talk of famine or the accompanying crimes — both petty and serious — was impossible. Instead, the media celebrated the *intelligentnost* of the populace living in agonising conditions,¹⁴² which, according to Kirschenbaum, was meant, among others, to offset the widespread talk of hunger and cannibalism, culture being the opposite end of the spectrum of human nature.¹⁴³

Contrary to many survivors' observation that rather than in arts those trapped in the besieged city were mainly interested in procuring and consuming food,¹⁴⁴ and that their moral levels disturbingly lowered during the blockade,¹⁴⁵ *L'Homme inconnu* supports the official image of *blokadnitsy* as capable of retaining both their dignity (*intelligentnost*) and high level of

138 See the interview with Matus in Simmons and Perlina, pp. 149–52. Matus recalls that rehearsals had to be short as musicians were weakened by hunger. It was the feeling of pride that helped them to get through the fifty-minute concert. 'And we proved that even in hunger and cold, Leningrad could still perform this symphony.' (p. 50).

139 Harrington, p. 242.

140 Reid, p. 358.

141 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 34.

142 *Ibidem*, p. 56.

143 *Ibidem*, p. 238.

144 *Ibidem*, p. 59. See also Ginzburg, p. 93.

145 Doctors noted, for instance, that the starving openly urinated in the most incongruous places. The sick were slovenly in relation to their appearance and often strikingly untidy in relation to food and the demands of personal hygiene. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 67. See also Kochina's account of her evacuation in the spring of 1942. 'People have gone crazy at the sight of food. They eat without interruption and defecate without interruption. [...] There we all crawl out of the train and squat beside the cars, side by side — men, women, children. The local population crowds around the train, looking at us in horror. "These are Leningraders, our culture, our pride", they sigh. But we're indifferent to all that. We don't experience shame or any other feelings. We ate well, and now it's so pleasant to free the stomach in order to stuff it again [...] Daytime life begins. Filled with quarrels, cursing, gluttony, diarrhoea.' Kochina, pp. 108–9.

culture (*kulturnost*) irrespective of the brutalising conditions of the siege. In line with the widespread notion that Leningraders' love of their city prevented them from cutting down trees for firewood¹⁴⁶ or from eating the zoo animals,¹⁴⁷ Makine shows Volsky and Mila admire the townscape despite the terrible cold and hunger they endure, and pondering upon the cruel contrast between 'deux millions d'êtres humains qui attendaient la mort' ['two million human beings waiting to die'] and '[la] ville à l'architecture féerique.' ['a city that was an architectural fairyland.'] (VHI, 188) Similarly, when pulling two corpses to the cemetery or chewing on a slice of bread between two air raids, Volsky marvels at the beauty of war-ravaged Leningrad as did real-life *blokadnitsy* who were touched and amazed by the unusual beauty of the frozen, empty city,¹⁴⁸ and who, as Polina Barskova argues, tended 'to replace the horrific with the beautiful, or to reconstruct the horrific as beautiful.'¹⁴⁹

[Le] regard [de Volski] reconnut le tracé des principales avenues, la flèche de la cathédrale Pierre-et-Paul et celle de l'Amirauté. Sur le promontoire de l'île Vassilievski, en face du palais d'Hiver, les batteries de la DCA pointaient dans le ciel leurs longs canons. Certains monuments étaient dissimulés sous un coffrage de planches qui les protégeaient des obus. La Neva s'étendait en une large plaine enneigée. La journée était limpide, bleue, plus belle que jamais grâce à absence de transports et de foules.

[[Volsky's] gaze took in the lines of the main avenues, the spire of the Cathedral of Peter and Paul and that of the Admiralty. On the promontory of Vasilievsky Island, opposite the Winter Palace, the anti-aircraft guns pointed their long barrels into the sky. Some of the monuments were hidden beneath a casing of planks as protection against shells. The Neva extended out into a broad, snow-covered plain. The day was clear, blue, more beautiful than ever, thanks to the absence of traffic and crowds.

VHI, 128

146 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 244. In reality the Leningraders' need for firewood destroyed some one hundred thousand trees and eighty thousand shrubs (p. 135).

147 Reid, p. 226. The Leningraders' devotion to their wild animals is illustrated by the story of Krasavitsa, the only hippopotamus in the USSR, whose keeper carried daily bucketfuls of water from the Neva to give the animal its bath.

148 Barskova, p. 328.

149 *Ibidem*, p. 331.

In another, highly significant scene, which is staged at the Five Corners Junction, Mila and Volsky marvel at the city's reflection in an expanse of frozen water, which calls to mind Vera Imber's ironic description of the first winter of the siege as particularly luxuriant: 'There is no end/To its splendour and bounties./It has bound the earth in a parquetry/Of mirrored panelling'.¹⁵⁰ If the spectacle of a town whose buildings, street lamps and stars 'se précipitaient sous terre' ['plunged deep into the earth'] is disturbing in its macabre beauty (VHI, 140), the presence of a reflective surface suggests a reversal of values. That Volsky's and Mila's world has indeed been turned upside down is confirmed by references to 'cette ville renversée' ['this upside-down city'] (VHI, 139), the narrator's remark that passers-by 'se détachaient de l'obscurité comme sur un négatif' ['stood out against the darkness, as if on a photographic negative'] (VHI, 134, emphasis added), or the already-evoked dead girl covered in hoarfrost, which renders the scene uncanny or even abject.¹⁵¹ Coupled with the use of the term 'abîme' ['abyss'] (VHI, 139) and of expressions such as 'une planète inconnue' ['some unknown planet'] (VHI, 141) or 'la ville morte' ['the dead city'] (VHI, 140), the mauve light in which Leningrad bathes at dusk strengthens the scene's sinister or perhaps even apocalyptic connotations. Indeed, with the Five Corners episode Makine is likely to be alluding to the eschatological mythology of the 'Venice of the North' which permeates the Petersburg text and which involves the themes of fantastic, phantasmagorical and macabre beauty,¹⁵² of apocalyptic destruction followed by redemption and spiritual purification of the urban space and its inhabitants,¹⁵³ and, finally, of sharp polarities: 'nature and culture, chaos and order, individual and state, enlightenment and despotism, future and crisis'.¹⁵⁴ According to both Kirschenbaum and Barskova, the Petersburg text strongly influenced the way *blokadnitsy* saw their city, memories of the nine-hundred-day siege moving

150 Vera Imber, *Dusha Leningrada (Izbrannoe)* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1979), pp. 17–18.

151 For Kristeva, a child's death is one of the things marking the apex of abjection. Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, p. 75.

152 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 25.

153 Barskova, p. 336. Barskova evokes, for example, Pavel Shilingovsky's figurations of the city, in which ruin and crisis are the most historically and rhetorically suitable states for Petersburg, and in which the mournful observation of destruction is accompanied by hope for the city's reconstruction (p. 341). With similar resonance is endowed the poem 'Leningrad Apocalypse' by mystic Daniil Andreev in whose view 'ruination brings new knowledge; thus the city returns to its true Petersburgian self, which is inalienable from its perilous and prophetic past' (p. 349).

154 *Ibidem*, p. 334.

towards 'the sacrificial, the prophetic, the sacramental, and the universally significant'.¹⁵⁵ Leonid Rakhmanov, for example, states that beside the blockade, which further strengthened Leningraders' love of their city, 'all of the calamities foretold by prophets and poets' paled.¹⁵⁶

While obviously marked by the eschatological imagery present in the Petersburg text, the Five Corners Junction episode resonates with other inter-textual references, such as Andersen's fairy tale *The Snow Queen*,¹⁵⁷ the frozen expanse of water invoking the 'troll mirror' in which everything good and beautiful dwindles to nothing, just as has done the life of the young girl sitting on the water's edge. As for Mila and Volsky, they call to mind the fairy tale's young protagonists, Gerda and Kay, in the sense that Kay's ultimate transformation thanks to Gerda's devotion to him finds reflection in Volsky's metamorphosis from recognition-seeking artist into social worker. And, even if it is Volsky who rescues his sweetheart after the war, thus reversing the two children's roles in Andersen's tale, Mila's influence upon Volsky's moral posture cannot be underestimated, for it is in memory of her devotion to the orphans that he spends his life working with disadvantaged and disabled children.

Finally, the reflective surface at the Five Corners Junction may also be seen as an allusion to the mirror stage, which, as we saw in previous chapters, is a recurrent theme in Makine's writing. As illustrated by the stories of Demidov, Berg or even Volsky, who fully realises his inner transformation when studying his mirror reflection in the aftermath of the battle of Kursk, in the Franco-Russian author's prose the looking-glass preserves its ego-building powers and positive significance assigned to it by Lacan. Also, like in Makine's earlier novels containing references to the mirror stage, in *L'Homme inconnu* the author introduces the motif of misrecognition when he describes Leningrad as '[u]ne ville inconnue' [[a]n unknown city'] and as a world upside down in both literal and metaphorical senses of the word (*VHI*, 139). Yet, unlike with *La Fille* or *La Musique*, with Volsky's story Makine questions both the mirror's constitutive function and customary conception as paving the subject's entry into the symbolic, as language fails to express the horrors of the siege. Whereas

155 Katarina Clark, *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 6. Quoted by Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 25.

156 Leonid Rakhmanov, 'Dusha goroda', *Moskva* (1957), p. 26. Quoted by Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 164.

157 For an analysis of Andersen's fairy tale, see Wolfgang Lederer, *The Kiss of the Snow Queen: Hans Christian Andersen and Man's Redemption by Woman* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1986).

on the eve of the scene '[l]es mots et les gestes s'enchaînaient encore dans un semblant de logique' ['[w]ords and actions still linked in a semblance of logic'] (VHI, 140), the spectacle of morbid beauty triggers a gradual dissolution of the bond between signified and signifier. When looking at the dead girl, Mila and Volsky are still capable, though hardly, of verbalising their experience. Soon afterwards Leningrad moves beyond words with terms such as 'war', 'siege' or 'famine' becoming inadequate to describe the reality of the beleaguered city: 'l'écho des paroles se brisait contre cette ville renversée, contre le sourire qu'on distinguait sur le visage figé de la jeune fille.' ['words were shattered by this upside-down city, by the smile that could be made out on the girl's frozen face'] (VHI, 139) In the end, Volsky and Mila cease to talk altogether:

Ils ne parlaient presque plus. Les mots adhéraient mal à ce qu'ils vivaient. Il aurait fallu appeler 'maisons' ces blocs de pierre abritant des cadavres. Et 'habitants' ces croquis humains flous, anguleux. La 'nourriture' signifiait le cuir bouilli, la colle des papiers peints diluée dans l'eau.

[They hardly spoke any more. Words had lost their grip on what they were living through. They would have had to refer to these blocks of stone harbouring corpses as 'houses'. And these vague, angular sketches of humanity as 'townspeople'. 'Food' meant boiled leather, and the paste from wallpaper diluted in water.]

VHI, 140

In this context, it seems only natural that, reversing the pattern of the mirror stage, the Five Corners Junction episode marks the return from culture to nature, which, in practical terms, signifies Leningrad's transformation back into the wilderness from which, in 1703, Peter the Great conjured the splendid city he was to name after himself. This process is illustrated by the comparison of empty roads to fjords, or by the pre-civilised existence of Leningraders who now drink water from the river, bury the dead in anonymous graves, and use books, sheet music and fine furniture as firewood.

Leaving the psychoanalytical reading aside, let us reframe this reversion of culture to nature with the Petersburg text where after apocalyptic annihilation comes spiritual regeneration, just as the Five Corners Junction episode is followed by the two central characters' discovery of Leningrad's artistic life and by their own correlated spiritual rebirth. One must note, however, the difference between prewar and wartime culture, where the former takes on the form of both *kultura*, signifying the achievement of the intelligentsia, and *kulturnost* that means the proper conduct in public. Associated with Soviet

meshchanstvo (middle classes),¹⁵⁸ in Vera Dunham's terms, *kulturnost* connotes 'the social climbing and careerism of the newly rich' or 'complacent vegetation'.¹⁵⁹ Having survived the siege, sung for his fellow *blokadnitsy* and for soldiers, and then fought all the way to Berlin, Volsky renounces the values of *meshchanstvo* and cuts himself from the idea of *kultura* that he now considers unbearably conceited. In this way, the singer's story illustrates the Soviet dictum that 'war forms the moral character of the people',¹⁶⁰ the scar barring his face signifying, like in Berg's case, Volsky's definitive break with his past, while his prematurely white hair externalises his newly-acquired wisdom. The hero's altered *Weltanschauung* manifests itself, for example, in his predilection for singing in chorus with his frontline comrades, a practice that will ultimately help him remember his fallen comrades, each of whom has a distinct voice and a specific way of singing. Naturally, Volsky's taste for simple melodies and lyrics parallels his dislike of the opera, a form of cultural production that is routinely styled as elitist:

Il trouvait à présent faux tous ces Boris Godounov tonitrueux qui, au comble d'une extase tragique, dardaient leur barbe pour mieux expulser les vibrations de leur puissance vocale. Risibles aussi ces légionnaires dodus de l'opéra italien, faisant tinter les écailles de leur armure de laiton. Ou encore ceux-là, en frac, la poitrine bombée par une virilité de coq triomphateur.

[All those stentorian Boris Godunovs, thrusting out their beards the better to squeeze out the vibrations of their vocal power at the height of tragic ecstasy, now struck him as false. Ludicrous, too, those plump legionaries in Italian opera, tinkling the scales of their brass armour. Or the ones in tailcoats, sticking out their chests like fighting cocks.]

VHI, 171

And, if Volsky ever mentally returns to his operatic days, it is to hum d'Artagnan's songs, an activity that recasts him in the role of the singer-soldier helping to boost the morale of his fellow Leningraders and soldiers.

To accentuate Volsky's spiritual transformation, Makine has his protagonist briefly toy with the idea of resuming his prewar life when he returns to

158 Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), p. 22.

159 *Ibidem*, p. 19.

160 Rakhmanov, p. 27. Quoted by Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 249.

Leningrad from the front. As if hoping to erase his traumatic wartime experience, Volsky dyes his hair black and visits the Café du Nord where he first met Mila and where he is now flirting with two female arts students. The same day the protagonist goes to the Kirov Theatre where he will experience his ultimate epiphany while watching *Rigoletto*. Makine's choice of Verdi's dark opera as one of his novel's intertexts is particularly fitting not only because it is *Rigoletto*'s leading part that Volsky once dreamed of singing, but also because its themes are confusion of identity and disguises. However, unlike in a comedy, here the ploys of the Duke of Mantua and Rigoletto,¹⁶¹ who both hide from Rigoletto's daughter, Gilda, their true name and position, have tragic and irreversible consequences as the heroine, mortally wounded, dies in her father's arms while the Duke's voracious masculinity goes unpunished. Even though the Duke's pretending to be a poor student in order to woo Gilda inverts Volsky's dream of leaving his peasant roots so that he may become a Leningrader and an artist, it still acts as a warning for the protagonist against assuming a false identity, which, importantly, the former singer also does in the hope of seducing women. Moreover, *Rigoletto* explores the motif of female sacrifice (Gilda dies to save the Duke), which finds its equivalent in Mila's self-immolation first for the orphans and then for Volsky when, during the Leningrad Affair, she shoulders the responsibility for the crimes she and her sweetheart have been accused of.

Read in the context of the devastating effect of the siege upon the human body, Volsky's attempt to erase the physical signs of his wartime experience, and with them the harrowing memories of the blockade and the front, may signify the return of the protagonist's desire, which, as male siege survivors note, was destroyed by cold, hunger and fear.¹⁶² Yet, since Makine's novels are about preserving the legacy of the Great Fatherland War, the logical choice for Volsky is to reject his erstwhile identity of a bourgeois and an artist, and instead to devote his energies to keeping alive the memory of the blockade and the front. It is already at the Kirov Theatre that the protagonist begins to be accompanied by a sensation of stiffness, his tinted hair feeling like a wig, which suggests the superficiality of Volsky's transformation and the incompatibility of the lifestyle he tries to regain with his newly-found doctrine. The impression of artifice then extends to the audience who, just like the actors on stage, appear to be playing roles and wearing theatrical costumes, so much so that Volsky seems to personally experience the discomfort felt by women wearing tight shoes. Similarly, he empathises with the men squeezed into dress uniforms which,

161 Makine refers to this character as the King.

162 Kirschenbaum, "The Alienated Body", p. 227.

sparkling with shiny decorations, seem too well-cut for the muddy roads of the war. Finally, the performance itself starts losing its mimetic power when the Duke, played by a corpulent middle-aged actor, pretends to be a poor student. It is this double travesty which makes Volsky see himself as an impostor and which, consequently, makes him decide to search for Mila, the only person who can help him resurrect the spirit of wartime authenticity.

No One Is Forgotten

If Berggolts's oft-quoted line has an ironic ring in relation to the Soviet state's policy towards war memory in general, the poet's personal connection to the city on the Neva, or the fact that her words commemorate those buried at Piskarevskoye Cemetery, make it a particularly apt heading for a discussion of Makine's portrayal of besieged Leningrad. Devoted to the Franco-Russian author's novelistic figurations of different categories of World War II victims, the present study will thus close with an examination of Makine's representation of the discrepancy between the siege survivors' personal memories and the regime's official line on this tragic episode. Like the protagonists of the writer's other novels, who are hardly ever free to voice their wartime experience, those of *Confession* and *L'Homme inconnu* find themselves unable to speak candidly about what they lived through and witnessed during the dark years of 1941–1944. Volsky's story also raises the correlated and recurrent question of the survivors' failure to reintegrate into and function in a society determined to forget the war as quickly as possible so that life may be restored in its reassuring banality. If these problems are also present in other cultural and political context,¹⁶³ in the case of the Great Fatherland War they were amplified by the Soviet authorities' both control over wartime memory and perfidious use of this memory for their own political purposes.¹⁶⁴ To explore these issues, in the remaining part of this chapter I will discuss Faya Moysseyevna's, Volsky's and Mila's attempts to preserve the legacy of the siege in the face of the authorities' endeavours to impose their own version of the past, which I will consider as a *mise en abyme* of Makine's own ambition to commemorate the victims of the

163 I am thinking here in particular of World War I veterans and the problem of the un-speakability of their frontline experience expressed in the writings of Jean Paulhan or Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. See Antoine Compagnon, 'Préface', in *La Grande Guerre des écrivains: D'Apollinaire à Zweig* (Paris: Gallimard, 2014), pp. 31–9.

164 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 200.

blockade and, by extension, of his tireless crusade against the alleged forgetting or undervaluing of the Soviet war effort by the West.

Like Pavel of *Requiem* or Alexei in *La Musique*, who on their return from the front fail to reconcile their wartime memories with the expectations of those who stayed at the rear and who wish to hear but tales of heroism and glory,¹⁶⁵ Volsky finds it impossible to talk about the siege or the front with those who did not share his experience:

[P]arler de la guerre n'était pas aisé. Et que dire ailleurs? Ces chars dont l'acier surchauffé laissait entendre un sifflement de la pluie? Leurs tourelles où expiraient les blessés, russes ou allemands? Expliquer que [l]a plus grande joie [de Volski], au front, ce n'étaient pas ces petits disques de médailles mais une poignée de fraises de bois cueillies à la va-vite avant de retourner dans la colonne de soldats?

[What else was there that could be spoken of? The tanks with their overheated steel that made a hissing sound in the rain? The turrets where wounded men, Russian and German, were dying? Explain how [Volsky's] greatest joy at the front was not those little discs of medals but a fistful of wild strawberries picked in a hurry before rejoining the column of soldiers?]

VHI, 176

Moreover, like his novelistic predecessors who are dismayed at the all-too-fast postwar return of normalcy, Volsky is disappointed to find Leningraders acting as if the siege never happened, which is articulated by the protagonist's negative reaction to the performance of *Rigoletto*, or by his thoughts on the return of peacetime concerns:

165 Pavel, for instance, 'avait l'étrange impression que les gens autour de lui parlaient d'une autre guerre et que de plus en plus ils croyaient à cette guerre qu'on inventait pour eux dans les journaux, sur les panneaux, à la radio.' ['had a strange impression that people around him were talking of a different war and that they increasingly believed in this war that was being invented for them in the press, on billboards, on the radio.'] (RE, 189) Similarly, when asked by Gavrilov's daughter to reminisce about the war, Berg wants to speak of the omnipresent death, brief sexual encounters or the squirrel that he witnessed being tormented to death by soldiers. Needless to say, Stella, who expects a heroic tale, is disappointed by such a narrative.

Quelques mois après la fin de la guerre, ce linge entre deux arbres, le chuintement de l'huile dans une poêle, les pleurs d'un enfant, un tango bégayant sur un disque rayé. Un soir de dimanche, comme s'il n'y avait pas eu ces rues balisées de cadavres, ces villes transformées en dentelles noires ... [...] L'arrogance du bonheur, l'indifférence vigoureuse des vivants. Ce monde-là lui était étranger tout comme, la veille au théâtre, le parterre rempli d'uniformes de parade.

[Just a few months after the end of the war, this washing hung between two trees, the hiss of oil in a frying pan, a child crying, a tango stuttering on a scratched gramophone record. A Sunday evening, just as if there had never been those streets dotted with corpses, those little towns transformed into charred black lace ... [...] The arrogance of happiness, the vigorous indifference of the living. This world was alien to him, just like the stalls at the theatre the night before, crammed with dress uniforms.]

VHI, 182–83

Importantly, by redefining the victor as the one 'qui sait oublier plus vite et plus dédaigneusement que les autres' ['who knows how to forget more quickly and more scornfully than the rest'], Volsky associates the resurgence of normal life with the ability to put one's experience behind (*VHI*, 183). He thus positions himself in the camp of the 'losers of history', as Wesseling defines those whose voices were excluded from official historical discourse but are beginning to be heard in postmodern historical novels. In other words, unlike official historiography and, by extension, its literary coeval — classical historical literature — that are about 'the victors of history', while blotting its 'losers' from popular consciousness,¹⁶⁶ postmodern historical fiction reinscribes the latter into our historical memory.¹⁶⁷ This is indeed what Makine does when he opposes those 'si sûrs de leurs vérités, si débonnaires, si durs' ['so certain of their truths, so easy-going, so hard'] (*VHI*, 201), to Mila who also clings on to her war-time identity by living in the building where the artists were lodged when singing for the troops, or by continuing to work as a prostitute. Reunited, Volsky and Mila instinctively head for the battlefield where they sang for the last time together and where they find an abandoned house that miraculously survived the shelling. That the building suits the couple's self-imposed seclusion is suggested by its insularity, additionally communicated by its comparison to a vessel gently rocking on the ocean swell of tall grasses. This comparison will

¹⁶⁶ Wesseling, pp. 110–11.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 111.

soon materialise when floodwaters cut Mila's and Volsky's home off from its surroundings, further increasing their isolation.¹⁶⁸ The location proves — albeit only temporarily — ideal for the prolongation of the wartime spirit of individual agency, spontaneous community and alternative lifestyles. Having renounced their artistic careers, Mila and Volsky take up jobs through which they can serve their fellow Leningraders and, rather than trying to fit in with postwar society that favoured the return of, to use Vera Ketlinskaya's phrase, 'familiar domestic tyranny',¹⁶⁹ continue to live in an informal relationship based on mutual love and respect. Indeed, the couple experience relief when they come across children playing in the courtyard, housewives arguing about the use of the oven, or a couple in Sunday best discussing a film they have just watched. This spectacle of bourgeois banality makes Mila and Volsky rejoice in 'cette liberté de ne pas vivre comme les autres.' ['this freedom of theirs not to live like other people.'] (*VHI*, 207)

First championed during the 1917 Revolution by the advocates of women's emancipation such as Aleksandra Kollontai, free union was often practiced during the siege, as evidenced by Ketlinskaya's short story *Nastyia* that centres on the protagonist's decision to leave his bourgeois wife for a colleague with whom he shared the horrific experience of the siege.¹⁷⁰ More broadly, free union was an expression of the sense of freedom created — paradoxically — by the war, and in particular by the blockade, the expectations of liberalisation being, in Kirschenbaum's view, more palpable in Leningrad than anywhere else in the Soviet Union.¹⁷¹ This is because the city resonated with the music of Shostakovich and with the poetry of Akhmatova, two artists persecuted in the 1930s and now hailed by the regime. Moreover, the idea that Leningrad survived mainly thanks to its own incredible efforts, and the correlated myth of the heroic city created by the local authorities in conjunction with local poets such as Berggolts, Imber or Ketlinskaya, encouraged the Leningraders' visions of the future to take 'particularly liberationist forms'¹⁷² and imagine peacetime as 'a moment of ultimate and even terrible individual freedom'.¹⁷³ This mood

168 Makine already explored the image of an island as a symbol of independence in *Le Testament* where he compares the steppe surrounding Charlotte's house to an ocean, and the imaginary France in which the Frenchwoman dwells in her Russian exile to the Atlantis. Similarly, in *Olga Arbélina*, the heroine's house, cut off from the rest of the Russian diaspora by floodwaters, becomes an island.

169 Quoted by Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 109.

170 *Ibidem*, pp. 108–10.

171 *Ibidem*, p. 107.

172 *Idem*.

173 *Ibidem*, p. 108.

is indeed reflected in *L'Homme inconnu* where '[o]n se parlait plus facilement, on souriait plus, tout le monde était pressé de renaître dans une rencontre, dans un regard échangé.' '[p]eople spoke to one another more readily; people smiled more, everyone was eager to come to life again in an encounter, in an exchange of looks.' (VHI, 177)

It is not only the categories associated with *meshchanstvo*, such as *kulturnost* or *poshlost*, but also *kultura* that Volsky and Mila reject, as illustrated by the sense of liberation the couple experience when passing the conservatory where they once studied or when watching an opera. The comparison of the conservatory to '[u]ne boîte à musique ... dérégulée' ['[a] musical box ... going off the rails'] and of the students spilling out of its building to 'figurines éjectées de la minuscule scène tournante' ['little figures spilling out from the tiny revolving stage'], conveys the falseness and triviality of high culture (VHI, 207). By the same token, when the couple watch an opera Volsky is once again struck by the falseness of the performance, just as is Natasha Rostova of *War and Peace*, who is visiting the opera for the first time and has not yet had the opportunity to appreciate theatrical artifice. And, although, unlike Tolstoy's young heroine, Volsky is well familiar with operatic conventions, by having his protagonist contemplate '[l]es acteurs déguisés en soldats' ['[t]he actors dressed up as soldiers'] or 'de[s] flammes en carton-pâte' ['cardboard cut-out flames'] (VHI, 207), Makine intends, just as did the author of *War and Peace*, to draw his readers' attention to the opera's depraved character. Additionally, in the description of Volsky's postwar experience of high culture, Makine's negative evaluation of the opera extends to the official commemorations of the war, as suggested by the perceived likeness of the actor playing a party leader to the overweight singer impersonating the Duke in *Rigoletto*. Also, the party leader's words — 'La ville de Lénine ne tom-be-ra ja-a-a-mais!' ['The Ci-ity of Lenin shall ne-ver fa-a-all!'] — sound hollow to Volsky who despises their formulaic triumphalism: 'les exploits, l'héroïsme, la mère patrie.' ['feats of arms, heroism, motherland.'](VHI, 207–8) As if to offset his disappointing experience, on his journey home Volsky hums the simple tunes which he learnt at the front and which Mila now teaches at the school, where, however, they turn out to be out of line with the curriculum made of cheerful patriotic outpourings.

Another way in which Volsky and Mila adhere to their siege-time principles is by making a formal application to adopt the orphans whom the heroine fostered during the blockade and whom the two artists are planning to teach to act, sing and stage plays. Also, in their spare time the couple collect artefacts on the nearby battlefield in order to deposit them in the newly founded museum of the siege. It is noteworthy that, despite the fact that '[l]a haine [envers les Allemands] paraissait naturelle comme la respiration' ['[h]atred

[of the Germans] seemed as natural as breathing'] (*VHI*, 211), the couple treat the Russian and the enemy remains with equal respect, whereby Makine underscores his compatriots' righteousness, just as he does earlier in the novel when Volsky abstains from shooting a young German tanker, or refuses to take notice of the nationality of the injured soldiers: 'Il se surprie à ne pas séparer les blessés russes et allemands. L'enfer créé par les hommes ...' ['He caught himself making no distinction between the Russian and German wounded. The hell created by men ...'] (*VHI*, 168) The narrator specifies that Volsky's open-mindedness results from his experience of the siege where he learnt to see human beings as 'une seule vie commune' ['one single communal life'] (*VHI*, 169), an idea that echoes the already evoked notion of the 'blockade brotherhood'; or, in Kirschenbaum's terms, of 'a community purified and unified by suffering and collective struggle'.¹⁷⁴

The activity of the two self-appointed archaeologists, whose objective is to rescue those who perished during their battlefield concert from oblivion reflects the postmodern approach to history which, in contrast to traditional historiography, gives priority to individual experience. By collecting artefacts and documents and thus trying to identify those buried in anonymous graves, the couple oppose the totalising state-fabricated memory of the blockade and, more broadly, of the Great Fatherland War, exemplified by the opera that draws a veil over Mila's and Volsky's own wartime experience. If during the postwar years Stalin maintained a policy of forgetting regarding the war without, however, placing a taboo on the theme,¹⁷⁵ this strategy was particularly stringently applied to Leningrad for which the generalissimo harboured a special and longstanding hatred, detesting the city's unique, European-oriented character.¹⁷⁶ In Kirschenbaum's words, Stalin had 'deep misgivings about Leningraders' "myth" of the self-sufficiency and unique fate of their city', which revived the old rivalry between the two capitals — the official and the symbolic —, the latter considering itself the political, revolutionary and, foremostly, cultural centre of Russia.¹⁷⁷ In practice, this meant that 'not a single obelisk, funeral mound (*kurgan*), or tank proposed by the architects was

174 *Ibidem*, p. 107.

175 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 101.

176 This was due to the opposition of the local party to the Central Committee in Moscow. See, for example, Clayton Black, 'Party Crisis and the Factory Shop Floor: Krasnyi Putilovets and the Leningrad Opposition, 1925–1926', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 46.1 (1994), 107–26 (pp. 121–22).

177 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 33, p. 107 and p. 116.

constructed within the city limits until after Stalin's death.¹⁷⁸ Instead, two victory parks were created: designated to mark the return of tranquillity and order rather than to remember the blockade, the parks hardly alluded to the war or even covered up wartime damage.¹⁷⁹ Finally, to silence the memories of the blockade, in 1949 the state launched the Leningrad Affair,¹⁸⁰ which was a purge of the local party hierarchy and which, without being expressly named, finds its reflection in *L'Homme inconnu* whose two central protagonists are unfairly accused of having planned to steal a wrecked German plane from the Museum of the Heroic Defence of Leningrad and bomb the party headquarters. As part of the Affair, the museum itself was shut down and the Leningrad blockade excluded from Soviet history of the war.¹⁸¹ If in *L'Homme inconnu* Makine describes the day of the museum's closure as 'le jour de la plus grande honte' ['the day of greatest shame'] (*VHI*, 235), in *Confession* he focuses on Faya's struggle against the persistent official silence over the blockade. The heroine spends years fruitlessly campaigning for the recognition of the victims of the siege with a monument or at least a marble plaque: 'Elle persévérait, portant en elle le déchirant souvenir de toutes les morts dont, enfant, elle avait été le témoin dans la ville assiégée.' ['She persevered, for she bore within her the harrowing memory of all the deaths she had witnessed as a child in the city under siege.'] (*CPPD*, 52)

If, during the late 1940s and early 1950s the war was commemorated at all, emphasis was placed on the Great Leader's military genius, wisdom and talent, as instantiated by the Square of the Fallen Fighters in Stalingrad that was graced with a monument to the Great Leader¹⁸² or, in Makine's eleventh novel, by the '[p]arades, défilés, discours à la gloire du Guide qui avait mené le peuple à la victoire.' ['[p]arades, processions, speeches glorifying the Leader who had guided the people to victory.'] (*VHI*, 215)¹⁸³ One day, Volsky comes across a dress rehearsal for a parade whose participants carry enormous and countless portraits of Stalin. Watching the men at work, the protagonist realises that among them must be those who lived through the horrors of the siege or who fought at the front, and who must therefore be burdened with 'un lourd dépôt de corps meurtris, de visage disparus.' ['the heavy burden of mangled bodies, faces gone forever.'] (*VHI*, 220) Yet, instead of letting themselves be positively transformed by their harrowing experience, these men are forced to suppress

178 *Ibidem*, p. 134.

179 *Ibidem*, pp. 133–39.

180 Simmons and Perlina, p. xxv.

181 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 116.

182 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 101.

183 Cf. Hansen, 'Stalingrad Statues and Stories'.

their memories, or rather to let these memories be overridden by the state-manufactured and falsely radiant version of the war. Conversely, the siege and the front have taught Volsky to enjoy the simple things in life, as well as to be tolerant, patient, generous and selfless. In this sense Volsky becomes not only an exemplary Russian, as portrayed by Makine's oeuvre, but also a reflection of Ginzburg's typical 'siege person' who, as Sandomirskaya puts it placing the critic's work in the context of Russian intelligentsia's ethical position, 'has a mission of creating critical knowledge, thinking in an ethically accountable way, and acting toward a democratic equality and social justice.'¹⁸⁴

Before concluding the chapter, I will discuss the narrator's meditation upon history writing, which underlies Volsky's story and which coincides with reflections found in historiographic metafiction that systematically expose the unreliability of historical memory, be it personal or institutionalised. For instance, as time passes, the former opera singer acknowledges the partiality of his knowledge, especially when it comes to the historical significance of his own contribution to the defence of Leningrad. He realises that he can but speculate that the battle with the participation of artists saved the city from being conquered and razed to the ground by the Germans, which is precisely what Hitler counted on doing, as evidenced by the invitations to the celebrations of the fall of Leningrad Volsky will come across later. Yet, whereas, according to the historian Harlow Robinson, the party at the Astoria Hotel was scheduled for 9th August 1942,¹⁸⁵ Volsky mentions the date of 18th December 1941, exactly two days after the battle during which he and his fellow artists sang for the soldiers. It seems that by changing the date and thus countering the historical record, Makine wishes, on the one hand, to boost the value of his protagonist's contribution to Soviet victory over fascism and, on the other, to reassert the creative licence of historical literature. Additionally, Volsky wonders whether it was his and his comrades' singing or the Germans' concurrent defeat close to Moscow that became critical to the course of the war. Echoing Tolstoy's remark about the apparently meaningless personal actions that can acquire historical significance and aid the war effort,¹⁸⁶ the protagonist then speaks of '[l]'impossibilité de trancher à la guerre, entre le poids de l'action collective et l'héroïsme d'un seul, la mouvante imprécision de leur équation' ['[the impossibility] in war to

¹⁸⁴ Sandomirskaya, p. 309.

¹⁸⁵ Harlow Robinson, 'Composing for Victory', in *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, ed. by Stites, pp. 62–76 (p. 70).

¹⁸⁶ This idea is discussed by Ginzburg in the opening of her diary where it is framed by the author's meditation on the significance of staying alive despite the conditions imposed by the siege. Ginzburg, p. 3.

judge between the impact of collective action and that of individual heroism, the fluctuating impression of weighing both in the balance'] (*VHI*, 164). Slightly modified, this idea returns later when Volsky learns that it was not his interrogator's nosebleed that saved him from the gallows, as he thought for years, but the self-sacrifice of Mila who, when questioned by the NKVD, assumed the full responsibility for the preposterous accusations levelled at the couple. The protagonist then concludes that 'le mal de ce monde pouvait être battu en brèche par la volonté d'un seul être.' ['the evil of this world could be put to rout by the will of a single human being.'] (*VHI*, 273)

Also, typically for historiographic metafiction, Volsky opposes his personal memories to official historiography, be it Soviet or written in the spirit of *perestroika*. Like Ivan of *La Fille*, who is dismayed at the discrepancy between his own frontline experience and the official version of the war, and later between his propaganda-colonised memories and the revelations concerning the Eastern Front made during the 1980s, Volsky finds disappointing the totalising and impersonal accounts of the battle in which he took part. Neither of the two studies he consults mentions the individuals who sacrificed or were ready to sacrifice their lives on that day, which indeed only personal testimony could successfully preserve and convey:

L'un comme l'autre ne rendraient compte ni de ce soldat qui venait de tracer une ligne de sang sur la neige, ni du calme de la maison préservée sous son arbre, ni surtout de cette boucle de cheveux sombres qui échappait du châle de Mila et qu'en chantant Volski atteignait par son souffle. Aucune histoire ne retiendrait non plus cette chaîne de soldats qui parvint à se hisser sur la crête.

[Neither one nor the other would make any mention of the soldier who had just traced a line of blood in the snow, of the tranquillity of that house, safe beneath its tree, or, least of all, of the lock of dark hair that had escaped from under Mila's headscarf, and was stirred by Volsky's breath as he sang. No history, either, would record that line of soldiers who managed to haul themselves up onto the ridge.]

VHI, 159–60

It is worth noting that Volsky's musings echo Claude Lévi-Strauss's remarks regarding history writing, which, importantly, anticipate the postmodern conception of history. 'Chaque épisode d'une révolution ou d'une guerre', writes the anthropologist, 'se résout en une multitude de mouvements psychiques et

individuels' ['Each episode in a revolution or a war resolves itself into a multitude of individual psychic moments']. He then adds that

[c]haque coin de l'espace recèle une multitude d'individus dont chacun totalise le devenir historique d'une manière incomparable aux autres; pour un seul de ces individus, chaque moment du temps est inépuisablement riche en incidents physiques et psychiques qui jouent tous leur rôle dans sa totalisation.

[[e]very corner of space conceals a multitude of individuals each of whom totalises the trend of history in a manner which cannot be compared to the others; for any one of these individuals, each moment of time is inexhaustibly rich in physical and psychical incidents which all play their part in his totalisation.]¹⁸⁷

Having said that, Lévi-Strauss himself observes that a history that would aim to capture all individual experiences would be impossible and therefore accounts of the past must always be partial in the dual meaning of the word: '[p]artiale même si elle se défend de l'être, [l'Histoire] demeure inévitablement partielle, ce qui est encore un mode de la partialité.' ['partial [...] even when [History] claims not to be, for it inevitably remains partial — that is, incomplete — and this is itself a form of partiality.']¹⁸⁸

Although implicitly agreeing with the French anthropologist, Volsky remains suspicious towards the historians' representation of the past that gathers multiple and scattered events into one coherent, unified and plausible story.¹⁸⁹ By pondering the value of his battlefield performance he also grapples with the distinction between events and historical facts, where it is the historian who grants an event meaning so that it can become a fact and enter the course of history.¹⁹⁰ Finally, Volsky exposes History's political bias and determination by present concerns when he criticises the *perestroika*-time study — but, curiously, not the communist one! — that speaks of the battlefield concert. '[L'étude] évoquerait "un simulacre de contre-offensive conçu par des responsables qui

187 Lévi-Strauss, p. 340. This and all the following translations of quotations from *La Pensée sauvage* come from *The Savage Mind*, trans. by George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1968).

188 *Ibidem*, p. 341.

189 *Ibidem*, p. 68.

190 Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 75.

cherchaient à se dédouaner aux yeux de Staline” [‘[The study] would refer to “a sham counter-offensive dreamed up by those responsible, seeking to clear their names in Stalin’s eyes.”] (VHI, 159) Volsky’s reaction here is once again reminiscent of that of Demidov who feels that, by mentioning the presence of the NKVD units behind the lines or Stalin’s cowardice in the face of the German invasion, the revisionist representations of the Great Fatherland War shortchange his own and his comrades’ memory. Likewise, in Volsky’s eyes, the criticism levelled by the historians at the battle in which he took part devalues the sacrifice of the soldiers and artists who perished that day or at least risked their lives, and who, motivated by patriotic zeal, at the time strongly believed their efforts to be necessary to save their city and perhaps also the whole country.

Conclusions

As indicated by, among others, the metatextual comments made by the narrators of *L’Homme inconnu* and *Confession* regarding the process of recording, preserving and conveying history, Makine’s two siege novels could be classified as historiographic metafiction. In practice, this means that these two works set themselves against the official Soviet figurations of the blockade and instead depict this tragic episode in World War II history as a series of personal and lyrical sketches while metatextually foregrounding the difficulties related to narrating the siege. As could be seen from my analysis of the two novels, Makine channels the siege of Leningrad through the tales of individual *blokadnitsy*, and seems to concentrate on helpless civilians whose plight the Soviet regime saw as incompatible with the image of a city heroically fighting the Germans. Moreover, this chapter’s final section has shown that Makine is unsparing in his critique of the postwar remodelling of the nine hundred-day blockade into a grandiose narrative, and deplores the persecution of survivors as part of repressing the memory of the German encirclement of the city on the Neva. However, these comments are only fully relevant to *Confession*, which attempts to present a complex portrait of the blockade and does not hesitate to tackle some of its more unpalatable aspects. In contrast, despite the appearance of a postmodern historical novel that is intent on offering a revisionist account of events and on giving voice to those previously disempowered and hence prevented from contributing to the official discourse on the past, *L’Homme inconnu* is, as my analysis has demonstrated, disturbingly pervaded by state-manufactured myths, such as those of the city front, the holy blockade women or the primordial role of culture in keeping up the Leningraders’

morale despite the dehumanising living conditions they had to endure. This is achieved with the description of Mila's and Volsky's artistic engagement, which, while promoting the idea of the Leningraders' high level of culture, re-establishes the synonymy between civilians and soldiers, and between the city and the front, which were both part of the propagandist representation of the siege. As for culture itself, Makine clearly separates its elitist and popular brands, deriding the former and, echoing Soviet propaganda, hailing the latter. Also, just as he does when writing about other aspects of World War II, in *L'Homme inconnu* Makine plays up the Soviet people's heroism, courage, steadfastness, stoicism, altruism, solidarity, propensity for self-sacrifice and *intelligentnost*, which means that as the author's oeuvre and with it his reputation grow, he progressively eschews the nuanced and at the same time more historically accurate view of the *blokadnitsy* found in his earlier novel. Finally, neither *Confession* nor *L'Homme inconnu* touch upon the local and central governments' incompetence, negligence or even outright violence in relation to the Leningraders, and blame uniquely the Germans for *blokadnitsy*'s incredible hardship. The two novels equally abstain from dealing with other hard issues that since *perestroika* have been openly discussed by survivors, instead resurrecting the Soviet-time myth of the *blokadnitsy* as a courageous, altruistic, moral and civilised community that heroically defended itself, the whole of the Soviet Union and Europe from Nazi violence.

Conclusions: Writing History of World War II as a Prophet

People in Russia say that those who do not regret the Soviet Union have no heart. Those who want to bring it back have no brain.

VLADIMIR PUTIN

• • •

Autocracy has founded and resuscitated Russia. Any change in her political constitution has led in the past and must lead in the future to her perdition.

NIKOLAI KARAMZIN

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The present study has demonstrated that the oeuvre of Andreï Makine not only subscribes to but also actively promulgates the view that there has been no greater crisis and simultaneously no more glorious moment in Russian history than the Great Fatherland War. The author's oeuvre also testifies to the fact that the myth of the war, which retrospectively legitimated the existence of the Soviet state and structured Soviet life after 1945, has outlived the polity that gave rise to it, encapsulating the best of Russia's communist past.¹ If Makine's quasi-obsessive interest in World War II could be seen as part of the recent revival of the preoccupation with *les années noires* among French novelists many of whom, like the Franco-Russian writer, create under the influence of postmodernism,² the French authors' motives for revising the Occupation and the Shoah are rather different from Makine's. Indeed, if novels by Binet, Humbert or Assouline can be identified as symptomatic of the trauma that is inseparable from France's memory of the four Dark Years, Makine's fascination with the war is more to do with the post-*perestroika* crisis of Russian identity

1 Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, p. 313.

2 I am thinking here of Pierre Assouline's *La Cliente* (1998) and *Lutetia* (2005), Soazig Aaron's *Le Non de Klara* (2002), Yannick Haenel's *Jan Karski* (2009), Jonathan Littell's *Les Bienveillantes* (2006), Fabrice Humbert's *L'Origine de la violence* (2009) or Laurent Binet's *HHhH* (2010).

and the resent enlisting of the memory of the Soviet defeat of fascism in the reconstruction thereof. Speaking more neutrally, Makine's focus on the period of 1941–1945 could be attributed to the imprint left by the war cult, whose apogee coincided with the author's youth, on Makine's imagination. Finally, in broader terms, it could be reframed as an expression of the Russians' fascination with their own history, with the relationship of that history to the history of the outside world, and with the idea of history itself.³ For, as Andrew Wachtel argues, the traditional Russian view has been that, although not everything may be right with our country at present, its splendid and unique past ensures its future important role: '[Russia] is a messiah among nations [...] whose time will come after the apocalyptic crash of the present order.'⁴ Indeed, the message carried by Makine's fiction is that although the Soviet Union as a state may have been oppressive towards other nations and its own people, not to mention its economic failure, it managed to make a considerable, if not decisive contribution to defeating fascism, whereby it established itself as one of the key players in postwar politics. To use Tumarkin's words, the Great Fatherland War was 'a historical event that allowed a ravaged empire a transition from power to superpower, and from a defensive victim of capitalist encirclement to aggressive leader of a world communist bloc.'⁵ Considering that the Great Victory continues to act as a symbol of Russia's political and military prowess, it is unsurprising that it was the USSR's encroaching collapse that gave Makine his creative impulse and stirred up his passion for war thematics. Thus, like Marcel Proust, to whom Makine has been — rightly or not — repeatedly compared and whose own writing began flowing only after his mother's death,⁶ the Franco-Russian novelist began publishing in response to a sense of loss provoked by the disintegration of his homeland which, coincidentally, in the Russian cultural context is maternally-connoted.⁷ This process of dealing with loss by mobilising creative energies is thematised by *Le Testament* whose protagonist combats his post-Soviet nostalgia by writing about his late grandmother and

3 Wachtel, p. 1.

4 *Idem*.

5 Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 102.

6 Hansen, "La simultanéité du présent"; Ian McCall, 'A *la recherche* as Intertext of Makine's *Le Testament français*', *The Modern Language Review*, 100.4 (October 2005), 971–84; Els Jongeneel, 'L'Histoire du côté de chez Proust: Andreï Makine, *Le Testament français*', in *Histoire, jeu, science dans l'aire de la littérature*, ed by Sjeff Houppermans, Paul J. Smith and Madeleine van Strien-Chardonneau (Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 80–91.

7 Hubbs, p. xii.

the imperial France which was her homeland and which, as I argue elsewhere, stands in for another extinct empire: the USSR.⁸

Without denying that nostalgia is its driving force, Makine's novelistic project is officially about wrestling from the clutches of Soviet historiography the memory of the moment when the USSR reached the pinnacle of its strength, energy and will. To achieve this, the author retells the war through a series of — to borrow Lyotard's term — *petits récits* about individuals whose war-time experience was undervalued or simply suppressed by the Soviet metanarrative and its central myth. To put it differently, Makine replaces History with histories, a totalising view of the past with supposedly disconnected impressions, images and fragments, and objectivity and omniscience with a partial, incomplete, provisional, pluralistic and self-doubting view of what happened. Such a strategy seems in tune with the ethos of postmodern literature that, by questioning the notions of closure, centre, hierarchy, homogeneity, unity, certainty, historical logic or a stable and cohesive self,⁹ programmatically engages in the revisionist rewriting of the past in order to refute the 'history from above'. It is indeed the epistemological, thematic and formal affinity between Makine's writing and what Hutcheon calls historiographic metafiction that originally encouraged me to assess the Franco-Russian novelist's commitment to postmodernism's radical political agenda. What I have hopefully shown in both Chapter 1, which examined the tropes and narrative techniques that Makine's novels share with postmodern literature, and Chapters 2 through 5, which concentrated on the author's representation of World War II, is the troubling incongruity between the poetics of Makine's prose and its underlying political message.

Although, as well as being 'resolutely historical', Makine's writing is 'fundamentally contradictory', and 'inescapably political',¹⁰ these adjectives do not have the same resonance as they do in Hutcheon's overwhelmingly positive evaluation of postmodern art. If for the Canadian theorist 'contradictory' captures historiographic metafiction's capacity to subvert the very concepts and conventions that it uses and inscribes,¹¹ Makine's prose inverts this pattern by reinstalling the order it pledges to undermine. In the present book this process has been exemplified with the author's conception of the role of documents in historical inquiry, which questions the pertinence and reliability of sources before eventually reasserting and accepting them. Likewise, the mosaic-like

8 See Duffy, 'La France que j'oublie d'aimer'.

9 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 57.

10 *Ibidem*, p. 4.

11 *Ibidem*, p. 3.

composition of Makine's novels, or the doubt regarding the process of acquiring and conveying historical knowledge underpinning them, do not preclude a totalising, ideologically-charged and pre-interpreted view of the past. As for the adjective 'political', Makine's writing is not a site of a simultaneous avowal and challenge of power, but rather, as Foucault would have it, of disavowal and re-inscription of control and domination.¹² This means that although Makine's efforts to write some of the World War II unmentioned victims back into Soviet historiography clearly defy the propagandist version of the war, they do so largely with the view of underscoring Russian heroism and victimhood in the eyes of the author's Western readers, of asserting the USSR's moral superiority, and, ultimately, of eliciting Western respect and compassion for the beleaguered and ravaged Soviet state. Hence, it has been my contention in the present book that Makine's political agenda is conservative or even reactionary and not, as with historiographic metafiction, radical in the sense of being revolutionary. In other words, the picture of the Great Fatherland War and, more broadly, of the communist era emerging from the writer's oeuvre is alarmingly concomitant with both Soviet historiography and the increasingly nationalistic, anti-liberal, anti-Western and even anti-Semitic discourse of today's Russian authorities.

Even if Makine's portrayal of the war resolutely steers away from the Manichaeism of the Soviet-time artistic and scholarly figurations of the Russo-German conflict, the compassion with which the enemy is almost invariably treated serves mainly the purpose of glorifying the inherent Russian tolerance, moral rectitude and capacity for forgiveness. In the same vein, notwithstanding its initial promise to offer an unvarnished account of the war, Makine's novels depict Soviet soldiers and civilians alike as paragons of patriotism, virtue, selflessness and kindness. While the looting carried out by the Red Army is fully justified by postwar hardship resulting from the Soviet Union's wartime devastation, when addressing — however scantily — the notorious issue of rape, Makine inexcusably deflects the attention away from the woman's ordeal. Instead, he focuses on the righteousness and plight of Soviet soldiers, on the suffering of their female relatives at the rear, and on the destruction of Mother-Russia itself. Other inconvenient truths about the war are either, as exemplified by the Soviet crushing of Finland in 1939–1940, entirely glossed over, or, as with the Katyn massacre, posited as a negligible side effect of the Great Victory.¹³ Indeed, facts including Stalin's pre-1941 collusion with Hitler and his

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 198.

¹³ Such a defiant attitude towards Katyn is shared by some historians, as evidenced by Elena Seniavskaya's recent book where the massacre is described as a tragedy (rather than as a

consequent invasion and occupation of large chunks of Poland are dismissed as part of the Western plan to belittle or even consign to the dustbin of history the USSR's central role in liberating the world from the Nazi yoke. Yet another set of issues, among which are Soviet soldiers' wartime collaboration with the enemy, desertion and self-mutilation, or the mass deportation of entire nationalities, are hardly mentioned and, if so, are treated elliptically. Finally, Makine represents Stalin's naïve trust in Hitler's loyalty and his resulting unpreparedness for the Nazi aggression as revelations that, although true, can only strip people's lives of meaning and divide society. With the same scepticism are treated the generalissimo's disrespect for human life and the ruthlessness with which he ran the war, having his own soldiers terrorised by the NKVD or having POWs stigmatised as traitors. Additionally, in some cases, as illustrated by the way Makine deals with the problem of rape, or by his take on the Holocaust, the Jewish soldiers or the predicament of *shtrafniki*, the author (ab)uses the victims' suffering in order to glorify the Christ-like sacrifice the Russians laid at the altar of the struggle against fascism.

Consequently, despite the fact that, unlike most Russian émigré authors who, writing in their native tongue, have continued to participate in their homeland's intellectual and cultural life from abroad, Makine is a monolingual novelist in an adoptive tongue whose target audience is decidedly in the West,¹⁴ his work is firmly rooted in Russian (or Soviet) reality and indebted to the traditional Russian (or Soviet) way of thinking. This translates not only into Makine's conception of Russians as a peace-loving people victimised by their own oppressive rulers and suffering from Western perfidy and hostility,¹⁵ but also, more generally, into a prose that is symptomatic of 'a conservatism that insisted on strong, centralised authority, unrestrained either by law or parliament,' as Richard Pipes has described the dominant strain in Russian

genocide) and is offset by the death of eighty thousand Russians POWs in Polish camps in the 1920s. Elena Seniavskaya, *Protivniki Rossi v voynakh XX veka: Evolutsiya 'obraza vraga' v soznani armii i obshchestva* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2006), p. 121 and pp. 214–15.

- 14 This category has been proposed by Elisabeth Klosty Beaujour, *Alien Tongues: Bilingual Russian Writers of the 'First' Emigration* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 52. Quoted by Adrian Wanner, 'The Russian Immigrant Narratives as Metafiction', *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 55.1 (Spring 2011), 58–74 (p. 58).
- 15 Vera Tolz has extensively written on Russia's complex and ambivalent relationship with the West. See Vera Tolz, 'Forging the Nation: National Identity and Nation Building in Post-Communist Russia', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 50.6 (September 1998), 993–1022; and 'Conflicting "Homeland Myths" and Nation-State Building in Postcommunist Russia', *Slavic Review*, 57.2 (Summer 1998), 267–94.

political thought throughout history.¹⁶ All this raises doubts about Makine's allegiance to the aesthetic and philosophical attitude of Western historiographic metafiction that Hutcheon views as 'inextricably bound up with a critique of domination.'¹⁷ Rather, if Makine's work has anything to do with postmodernism, its message, if not its form, is much closer to the recent Russian fiction which I discussed in this book's introduction and which has been branded 'new political literature', or 'new imperial literature'.¹⁸ For, even if Makine's work fails to share these contemporary Russian writers' playfulness, irony, humour and predilection for language games, it evidently partakes in the ideological principles underpinning their output. In other words, Makine seems to have reclaimed postmodern poetics to articulate a profoundly conservative agenda. Authoritarian, anti-Western and even at times racist and anti-Semitic in tone, his novels express a longing for a strong Russia that is protected from alien — that is Western — ideas, such as market economy, liberal democracy, racial equality or even feminism.

By bemoaning the USSR's collapse and the concomitant disappearance of inherently Soviet social structures, norms and values such as *sobornost*, humility, altruism, patriotism, veneration of authority, or *priiterpelost*, as well as by reviving the myth of the Great Victory and harking back to the 'good old days' of communism, Makine's work seems to have heralded today's Russian politics and to be serving the *raison d'état*. After Boris Yeltsin's government unsuccessfully tried to boost Russia's national pride by hailing figures such as Peter the Great or Alexander Pushkin who participated in Western cultural achievements,¹⁹ the Putin administration has made the Great Fatherland War, which for decades was the paradigm of suffering and victory,²⁰ into the central historical event of the twentieth century. He has done so, as Wood explains, with the view of consolidating the nation and giving post-Soviet Russia legitimacy and status as a world power.²¹ By resurrecting the myth of the war, Putin does not have, continues Wood, 'to create a new ideology because "everyone knows" that the nation is sacred in its suffering and rebirth, in its role as a

16 Richard Pipes, *Russian Conservatism and Its Critics: A Study in Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 1.

17 Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 4.

18 Noordenbos, p. 147.

19 Nikolay Koposov, "'The Armored Train of Memory': The Politics of History in Post-Soviet Russia", *Perspectives on History* (January 2011) <<https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2011/the-armored-train-of-memory-the-politics-of-history-in-post-soviet-russia>>.

20 Wood, p. 175.

21 *Idem*.

saviour of Europe from the evils of the barbarian Nazis.²² Likewise, Nikolay Koposov notes that, under Putin, World War II has become central to the new 'memory politics' as part of the aggressive and nostalgic reaffirmation of Soviet values; by rallying the Russians around a powerful state rather than its cultural heritage, the current regime can justify the increase of the president's power, the growth of state bureaucracy, the domination of the executive over the legislative power, the destruction of the multiparty system, and the return to a neo-imperial stance in foreign policy.²³

Since Makine's prose both shares the ideological underpinning of recent Russian postmodern novels and demonstrates affinities with Putin's memory politics, it cannot be easily classified as historiographic metafiction or, alternatively, problematises the Hutcheonian understanding of the genre as endowed with a radical potential and uncontaminated by nostalgia. Instead, Makine's novels corroborate the position of those of postmodernism's critics who consider the movement as neoconservative,²⁴ or accuse it of re-inscribing the 'history of victors'.²⁵ This is because for Makine an understanding of the past, be it Russian or French, that is not grounded in a foundational metanarrative such as that of the Great Victory or the resistentalist myth, is clearly hard to accept or even inadmissible. Correlatedly, Makine's prose, which aspires to constituting a voice in the international debate about Russia's history that has been going on since *perestroika*, flatly repudiates any criticism levelled at the author's homeland, and especially at its role in World War II. It thus proves consistent with the current Russian policy against the 'falsification of history to the detriment of Russian interests', which is achieved by opposing the 'memory wars against Russia' waged in the Soviet Union's former republics such as Ukraine or the Baltic States, or in the former satellite countries such as Poland.²⁶

This leads me to my very final reflection, which concerns the potential impact of Makine's very popular and indisputably engaging and moving novels upon World War II memory in the West, which is where the author's works find their main audience. For, although by writing historical fiction Makine benefits from more license than a historian, his work dangerously presents itself as equal or even superior to academically rigorous accounts of the past when it joins the postmodern assault on the frontier between verisimilitude

22 *Idem.*

23 Koposov.

24 Habermas, pp. 13–14.

25 Foster, p. 70.

26 Koposov.

and veracity, or hails the novelist's moral authority and the power of fiction to convey history. As contemporary philosophers of history remind us and as Makine himself perfectly realises, myths are a powerful tool in forging people's minds. In this light, we ought to ponder the ethics of the Franco-Russian writer's work, which, while condemning totalising historiographies and propagandist discourses of authoritarian regimes, promulgates a mythical, selective and politically-biased vision of the past that is designed to and indeed runs the risk of shaping its readers' historical consciousness.

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